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The Honeymoon: Edward's POV

by [ObsessedtwibrarianOTB](#)

Summary

What exactly happened from that touching moment in the bay until morning, when Bella woke up with feathers in her hair? No honeymoon is completely perfect—especially when the two people involved have never done anything like this before, and especially when the couple is Bella and Edward, with all their unique problems. Experience the honeymoon from Edward's unique POV.

Notes

I wrote this way back when Breaking Dawn (the book) was released, and LONG before any thought of Breaking Dawn The Movie was ever conceived. Like many at the time, I was dissatisfied with SM's "fade to black", so I decided to write my own version of the honeymoon from Edward's POV. This is just one of a ton of honeymoon stories that were written back then, but I think my version is different from any that you have read. This story is completed, but it isn't posted on FFn (or anywhere else but my own fan fiction site), which means I have to manually post all of the chapters. Please be patient! :) P.S. Throughout the story I have used bits and pieces of SM's original dialogue for authenticity's sake (especially in the beginning. No infringement. This is just for fun, folks!), but the majority of this story is my own words.

Isle Esme



"This is Isle Esme," I murmured, as our boat drew close to the short dock. When I cut the engine, there was a profound silence. Only the gentle lapping of the water against our boat could be heard. The moon loomed large in the night sky and bleached everything to an eerie white. The tropical fragrances wafting through the palms and in the air were so different from the ones at home, assaulting my senses, bringing back a flood of memories. My family had spent many a summer here enjoying our freedom from prying eyes, and drinking up the sun's rays. I loved this place.

"Isle Esme?" Bella asked.

"It was a gift from Carlisle. Esme offered to let us borrow it."

I smiled at the memory of that day when Esme had approached me rather hesitantly about our honeymoon plans. She had asked me to take a walk with her in the woods, which was unusual, but I'd readily agreed, my curiosity piqued. We had wandered far away from the house, talking idly about inconsequential things, until we'd gotten quite a distance away. At some point in our walk, she'd turned the conversation to her initial purpose. I'd listened, awestruck, as she'd told me, in hushed tones, the touching story of how Isle Esme had come to be. And I remembered wondering at the time, how all that could have happened without any of us knowing about it. When she'd finished, I'd fallen silent, stunned by the romantic intimacy of her story and the beautiful way that things had all worked out in the end.

When she'd asked if I would like to take Bella there for our honeymoon, I hadn't hesitated for a second. I'd told her 'yes' immediately. If Isle Esme could do for Bella and me what it had done for Carlisle and Esme, then it would be the perfect place for us to start our life together.

I put our suitcases on the dock and returned for my bride. She extended her hand out to me and I smiled back at her. There was no way my wife was going to walk to her honeymoon rendezvous. I bent over and effortlessly swept her up in my arms.

“Hey, aren’t you supposed to wait for the threshold?” she asked, laughing lightly.

“I’m nothing if not thorough,” I answered, grinning.

I carried our suitcases, and my blushing bride, through the low-lying island growth until we finally reached the house. When I stopped just outside the door, I could hear her heart thudding in her chest. There was no need for me to wonder what she was thinking. Her thoughts were, more than likely, the same as mine.

I put down the luggage, opened the door and carried Mrs. Cullen across the threshold and into our new home, at least for the next few weeks. I continued through the house, not bothering to turn on any lights. The moon was shining brightly through the windows, bathing the rooms in calming blue shadows. But when I reached our bedroom, I stopped inside the doorway and switched on the light, dimming the brightness until the room glowed softly.

It was decorated much like our Forks home: lot of white and beiges, and the far wall was mostly glass, just as I remembered. But what I didn’t remember was the huge bed in the middle of the floor, that big monstrosity draped with mosquito netting all around it. *Holy crow!* as Bella would have said. The one that used to grace this room was much smaller. *Very funny, whoever you are. Esme? Alice? Emmett??* It was hard to tell whose idea it could’ve been, but at the moment I was absolutely mortified.

I gently set Bella down on her feet and searched my mind for a distraction. “I’ll...go get the luggage,” I said uncomfortably.

When I returned with the suitcases, I had somewhat recovered from the shock of the bed, but evidently Bella hadn’t. She was standing in front of it, gently fingering the mosquito netting like it was something alive that might bite back.

I walked up behind her and touched my finger lightly to a drop of perspiration on her neck. I brushed it away, inhaling the moist, tantalizing scent coming off of her skin. The room was much too warm and I loved it.

“It’s a little hot here,” I said apologetically. “I thought...that would be best.”

“Thorough,” she murmured under her breath.

I chuckled nervously at that. *Thorough?* Some would call it obsessive compulsive.

“I tried to think of everything that would make this...easier,” I admitted. I had spent hours during the days leading up to the wedding trying to imagine every conceivable thing that could possibly go wrong, and making a contingency plan for each one. I had finally decided that a hot room would make my body temperature more tolerable for her—her own personal air conditioner—and that the balmy tropical waters of the bay would help warm my body temperature to a comfortable, almost human, level, before we....

I sighed inwardly. *Come on Edward. Time to get the ball rolling, get this show on the road, break a leg, win one for the Gipper.*

I took a metaphorical deep breath and dove in head first. “I was wondering,” I said slowly, “if...first...maybe you’d like to take a midnight swim with me? The water will be very warm. This is the kind of beach you approve of.”

“Sounds nice,” she said, her voice breaking nervously. *I know, Bella. We’re both scared out of*

our minds.

“I’m sure you’d like a human minute or two. It was a long journey.” *Stalling, Edward?*

She nodded at my suggestion. I brushed my lips against her throat, just below her ear, thinking it might make things less awkward between us. I chuckled at that delusion. Nothing, not even the feel of her skin, could calm my nerves at that point.

“Don’t take too long, Mrs. Cullen,” I breathed into her ear. She jumped when I called her Mrs. Cullen. It did take a little getting used to, especially since I’d never thought in a million years that we’d ever make it to this point. I kissed my way down her neck to the tip of her shoulder. “I’ll wait for you in the water.”

I turned to leave the bedroom before my nerve totally deserted me. As I walked past her, I shrugged out of my shirt and dropped it on the floor. Without stopping to gauge her reaction, I slipped out through the wide French doors and into the moonlit night.

Anticipating the warmth of the water on my skin, I hurriedly shed the rest of my clothes and slung them over the branch of a palm. I waded in waist deep, savoring the heat of the water that was gently lapping against my body. Normally, I would have spent the next few hours completely submerged, swimming through the inlet, exploring every hidden crevice on the bottom, watching with wonder the teeming life on the ocean floor. Not tonight. Tonight, I was too jittery to be curious about anything except what Bella and I were about to do. Every nerve ending in my body was tingling with anticipation and anxiety. I settled for submerging myself for just a few moments, if only to try and calm my quaking nerves.

Not for the first time, I wished that I had never made this promise to Bella. I would take it back in a heartbeat if I thought she would let me. The thirst was no longer a problem for me, but the burn was always there. Its power had faded over time until it was more like “white noise” now. I was aware of it, but I really didn’t notice it unless I concentrated on it. It wasn’t the thirst that had me so anxious. What I was truly worried about was whether I would be able to contain the strength of my own body when the time came, and that thought terrified me.

I had spent countless hours planning this night. I had talked to my brothers, read countless books and even watched movies of couples passionately making love with wanton abandonment. Those I’d been forced to dismiss as utterly ridiculous. I could never approach this with such carelessness. My conclusion, after all of that, was that nothing or no one could really prepare me for this. It was something I was going to have to muddle through and experience for myself. The only thing I knew for sure was that I would have to be in total control at all times for this to have a good ending.

I gazed up into the night sky wondering, perhaps for the thousandth time, if He was really up there somewhere. Did He even pay attention to the pitiful pleas of such inconsequential beings as us? When there was so much misery in the world—starvation, war, poverty—how could I even think that my situation merited even a second of His time? I decided to err on the side of caution anyway, and ask for His help.

“Please, if you’re listening, please help me to not... hurt her,” I whispered quietly into the darkness. I waited for a moment, for what, I didn’t know. Of course, there was no answer, no quiet reassurances that everything was going to be all right. I sighed. I was on my own, and wondering what in the hell I had been thinking when I’d agreed to this.

At that very moment, from within the house, I heard her quietly whisper the words ‘Don’t be a coward’. She was scared, too. That should have made me feel a little better, but it didn’t. The pressure was all on me. I was the one who could seriously mess this up if I wasn’t careful.

Then I heard her walking slowly toward me through the powdery sand.

I can't do this, but I want to. I want this more than I've ever wanted anything in my life.

I decided to wait with my back to her. I knew she was probably walking very carefully through the water, because it seemed like an eternity before she was finally standing beside me. She reached out under the water and took my hand in hers.

"Beautiful," she said, looking up at the moon.

"It's all right," I answered, unimpressed. I had seen this moon so many times in my life, and it always looked the same. But Bella? Now there was a beauty that was always new and ever-changing. I turned to face her. "But I wouldn't use the word beautiful. Not with you standing here in comparison."

She half-smiled at my compliment and then placed her free hand over my heart. I shivered at her warm touch; my breath quickened at the sight of her hand against my pale skin. I felt a surge of emotion so strong that it scared me.

"I promised we would try," I whispered, my voice suddenly intense. "If...if I do something wrong, or if I hurt you, you must tell me at once."

She nodded as she gazed steadily into my eyes. Then she stepped closer and leaned her head against my chest. I closed my eyes and sighed at the feel of her body pressed completely against mine.

"Don't be afraid," she murmured. "We belong together."

"Forever," I agreed. I gently put my arms around her and just held her. I was still stunned that she was really mine now, that forever was finally going to happen for us.

I tenderly pulled her away from me so that I could look at her. We both stood silent in the warm water of the inlet, drinking in the sight of each other's bodies. I reached out for her hand and our fingers entwined tightly. I leaned in and brushed my lips against hers.

She softly touched my face with her free hand, and then began to lightly trace the contours of my body with her fingers, starting down the side of my neck, across my shoulder and ever so slowly down my arm. I shivered as she returned back up my arm and then moved down my chest. She brushed her fingers fleetingly over my nipples, and my body reacted. She continued her exploration down to where the water met my waist, and then hesitated. *Don't stop*. But, unfortunately, she did. She dropped her hand, stood back and looked at me, waiting expectantly.

My eyes left hers and traveled slowly down her body, stopping at her breasts. They were so perfect, more beautiful in actuality than they had ever been in my pitiful imagination. I let go of her hand, and reached out to lightly trace the contours of them with my fingertips, moving in slow circles until I reached their center. She closed her eyes and moaned softly when my thumbs brushed over her nipples.

I tugged gently on her chin, and lifted her face to mine. I kissed her over and over again, whisper soft kisses. Our lips never completely separated as we gently explored each other's mouths and murmured our love. Then I kissed my way to her neck, just below her ear. The sound of her blood rushing through her body stirred me, but not in the way I had expected. It was strangely...erotic?

"What about our swim?" I whispered as I nibbled her ear gently.

“Not interested,” she said, gasping as my tongue found the small opening of her ear. Neither was I.

I then proceeded to kiss every single inch of her face and neck. I had never been able to fully indulge myself before. Now, with no restraints, I became totally absorbed in it. There wasn't a single place that didn't feel the brush of my lips and tongue. Her breath was coming faster now, and it only fueled the fire growing within me.

Then, unexpectedly, her fingers were entwined in my hair, and she pulled my mouth to hers with such intensity that I never thought to fight it. I did what I'd yearned to do since the very first time our lips had touched that day in the meadow long ago. I surrendered to it completely. I let myself fall, drowning in her smell with my hands buried in her hair, exploring her mouth hungrily with my own, and moaning softly into the night as our tongues touched.

My hands were all over her now, running through her hair, cupping her breasts, tracing the lines of her back with my fingers, gently kneading her bottom beneath the water, and continuing on to the one place I hadn't yet explored. She gasped, and whispered my name as she pulled at my hair and lightly scraped her nails down my back. *Oh God...*

Then she took me gently in her hand, and I groaned loudly into her mouth, begging her not to stop, and proceeding to tell her exactly what else I wanted her to do. That total control I was supposed to have at all times?? Yeah, it was gone. Completely gone.

Slow down, Edward! My mind was screaming at me to stop, but my body wasn't listening. Somewhere, somehow I found the will to pull away. She was trembling and gasping for air as our lips parted. The last thing I wanted to do was rush this. We leaned against each other, breathing heavily, waiting patiently for the fire die down.

“Edward,” she finally whispered.

“Mmmm?” I murmured, not wanting to ruin this moment with conversation.

“I'm going to turn into a prune,” she said, laughing quietly.

A prune? What?? I chuckled at the complete absurdity of her statement at this particularly intimate moment. “What are you talking about, love?” I laughed and nuzzled my face in her hair, running my fingers down her back.

“I can't stay in the water forever like you can. I'll wrinkle up like a prune, and prunes are not very sexy.”

Oh, that's right. I forgot. I pulled back so I could see her face. “Would you like to take this inside then?” I asked with a sly smile.

She smiled back, one eyebrow raised suggestively. “Oh...yes,” she whispered.

The First Attempt

She cried out laughingly when I swept her up in my arms and made our way slowly out of the water. I was, as Bella often pointed out, extremely talented at everything, but even I had to see to walk. She kept continually pulling my face to hers, kissing me everywhere, darting her tongue into my mouth, blocking my vision and generally causing me to lose my concentration. When she tenderly tugged on my lower lip with her teeth and sucked gently, I actually stumbled. I'd never stumbled in my entire life!

"Stop, Bella!" I laughed. "We're never going to make it into the house if you don't."

She giggled and continued to lay a path of soft kisses down the side of my neck. We finally managed to reach the open bedroom doors. As I passed through, I switched off the light, leaving the moon as the only source of illumination in the bedroom. I set her down gently beside the bed, and detoured to the bathroom to grab some towels. When I returned, Bella had pulled back the comforter on the bed, leaving a monstrous expanse of white sheet, and a mountainous pile of pillows. *Okay...*

When we were finally dry and sand-free, we found ourselves standing awkwardly beside that huge bed, staring nervously into each other's eyes, each waiting for the other to make the first move. *That would be me...* I leaned into her and softly kissed her, over and over again. I just couldn't get enough of it. I had kissed her more tonight than in our entire time together. She sighed as she wrapped her arms around my neck and pressed her body close to mine. My hands traveled slowly down her back and her thighs, grabbing her bottom and gently lifting her up. She instinctively wrapped her legs tightly around my hips. I supported her back with my arms as my mouth searched for and found her breasts. I took each one in my mouth and sucked gently. I gasped aloud at the sensation of her nipple hardening in my mouth, my fingers digging into her back in response.

"I've wanted you for so long," I whispered hoarsely against her skin.

I pulled her hips back a little from my body. Our eyes met and held, communicating our thoughts without speaking. Now, they said. I gripped her bottom in my hands as I slowly entered her, pushing gently but firmly through the resistance.

I squeezed my eyes shut and groaned loudly. The intense heat of her body completely enveloping mine drove every bit of reason from my mind. A distant part of me was mortified to hear myself moaning every vulgar and profane word I'd ever heard into her ear, and I was powerless to stop it. Her own soft cries, and her nails scratching into my back, only added to my insanity. I had been right. Nothing could have prepared me for this.

Then, unexpectedly, I was slammed with the full force of the blood lust. Every inch of my body was ravaged by the searing pain of it. Shocked, I clamped down on it, hard, grinding my teeth against its devastating power. Her heartbeat grew so loud in my head that it drowned out every other sound. There was nothing else in the universe that mattered to me now except that throbbing, steady beat. As if from a great distance, I heard someone whimpering and sucking in air like a dying man. I was stunned when I realized it was me and that I was so very close to losing it.

No! DAMN YOU, NO! I screamed inside my head. I pulled out of her quickly, and focused on pushing her away from me as fast and as gently as I could. When she was once again standing in front of me I leaned my forehead against hers, eyes shut tight, my body shaking and still fighting for control. I searched desperately for her hand in the dark and entwined my fingers in hers when I

found it. I didn't want to meet her eyes; it would kill me to see the hurt in them.

But my Bella, she constantly surprises me. She reached out with her free hand and gently stroked my cheek and crooned to me in the darkness. Strangely, it helped. Her soft voice soothed and quieted the loathsome monster in me as she patiently pulled me back from the brink.

"This isn't going to work. I'm so sorry," I whispered when I had finally gained enough control to speak. I continued to whisper apologies to her in the darkness. The anguish I heard in my voice paled in comparison to the intense shame and self-loathing I felt inside. She softly shushed me as she stroked my face and ruffled her fingers through my hair. "I thought this was behind us," I said, still shocked at the intensity of it. It had almost been as bad as that first time I'd seen her in Biology, long ago.

"Did I do something wrong?" she asked. *My Bella. Always so willing to always blame herself.*

I barked a short, angry laugh. "Don't be absurd. I just wasn't prepared for the..." I stammered, struggling to find the words to describe the moment our flesh became one. I tried again. "I wasn't expecting it to be so..." My voice trailed off. I was, for once, at a total loss for words.

It was her turn to tug at my chin, forcing me to meet her eyes. "Totally mind-blowing, earth shattering, and completely awesome?" she asked, with a devastatingly sexy smile. We both laughed quietly in relief and mutual understanding.

I chuckled. "You took the words right out of my mouth."

When our laughter died, she kissed me gently and continued stroking my cheek. "If you stop and think about it, every time you've tried something new with me, you've had to deal with this. Remember that day in Biology? You nearly killed me that day." I winced at the memory. "And remember that first day in the meadow, how hard it was for you? And when you saved me from James' venom? I can't even imagine the agony that must have caused you. But every time, you overcame it, Edward. With sheer will power, and a little practice, it all got easier for you."

"I'm so scared for you," I whispered, shaking my head at her logic. "I don't think I can do this without hurting you."

"Edward, you're not listening. You know what to expect now. Next time it won't be such a shock to your system. It'll be easier. All you need is a little more practice," she said with a small, determined smile.

I pray she is right.

As she pulled me onto the bed with her I realized that I was soon about to find out, and selfish creature that I was, I could hardly wait.

Bella's O

Bella pulled me onto the bed with her, scooting slowly backward until she reached the mountain of pillows. I followed her, on my knees now, continually kissing and touching her the whole way. I laid her gently back onto the mound of pillows. Her hair, damp with sweat, spilled out around her, and her eyes gazed back at me with intense longing—deep pools of brown that tugged fiercely at my heart every time I looked into them.

I held my upper body up with both arms and pressed my hips against hers; we both moaned at the contact. She grabbed a fistful of my hair, pulling my mouth down on hers with such fierceness that I nearly lost what little control I had left. I wanted her so badly, but I had to be much more careful this time.

I tore my lips from hers, gasping. “Bella,” I said hoarsely, my face only inches from hers. “You have to let me do this my way...slowly. Please,” I pleaded softly. She gave a small sigh, and silently nodded. After the unexpected return of the blood lust earlier, I was determined to proceed this time with more caution. Reckless lovemaking was out of the question for us.

I steeled myself as I slowly entered her, but only a couple of inches at first. I stopped, closed my eyes and waited nervously to see if the blood lust would return. Nothing. Then, a couple inches more. I stopped, again waiting for the agonizing pain to totally consume me. Nothing. Bella whimpered beneath me, digging her fingers into my arms.

“Wait! Just a moment... please Bella,” I whispered roughly.

Then a couple more inches. I stopped, waiting for the familiar ache and the flow of venom. Still nothing. I waited a few moments longer, just to be sure. Nothing. I slowly pushed the rest of the way and felt absolutely nothing. Well, nothing but the agonizingly tight, intense heat of her body around mine, which was on the verge of driving me completely insane! *Thank you, God.* Maybe He really was up there.

“Are you okay?” she asked softly, her eyes wide with concern.

I nodded, physically unable to speak at the moment. This was going to work after all.

She smiled smugly. “I told you.... practice.”

We laughed quietly as I pulled out slowly, bringing forth a soft gasp from her lips. And then my body went completely and utterly still. I vaguely heard Bella asking me what was wrong, but I ignored her. I had no choice but to ignore her, because I smelled blood—fresh blood...and *sweet*, Bella’s blood. I made the horrible mistake of glancing down. There were faint streaks of blood on my body. I groaned, closed my eyes and gritted my teeth against the onslaught that I knew was coming.

“Just give me minute,” I said between clenched teeth, my body tensed with the strain.

I stopped breathing and totally focused on controlling the monster inside of me. I waited patiently for him, ready for whatever he could throw at me, but he never stirred. I opened my eyes a few moments later, resisting the urge to look down, and spoke calmly and quietly to Bella. “I’m fine. It’s nothing, nothing at all.” I smiled at her, relieved that yet another crisis had been averted. She smiled back and then stared heatedly into my eyes. Just then, a small, sweet, tantalizing sound slid from her lips as she suggestively pressed her hips against mine. And I totally lost it. *I’ve had it with slow and cautious.*

I plunged into her in one long, smooth thrust. We both cried out at the sudden raw, primitive shock of pleasure. Then I found a slow, steady rhythm that drew beautiful low moans from her throat. I was amazed at my newfound ability to bring forth such luscious sounds from her lips. I reveled in the tempting way she rhythmically pressed her hips up against mine. I was completely enthralled with every sound coming from her lips, every expression sweeping across her face, and every small movement of her body against mine. So much enthralled that I completely forgot about my own pleasure until I suddenly became aware of an intense pressure building in me. I moaned aloud. *No! I don't want it to end this quickly!* I stopped moving inside her, holding my body perfectly still, whispering urgently to Bella to not move. Thankfully, she listened. After a few moments of fighting my body's overwhelming need for completion, the pressure finally lessened and faded temporarily into the background. I sighed and leaned down into her, kissing her tenderly.

"What's wrong?" she asked in between brushes of my lips.

"I need to slow down," I answered quietly. "I don't want it to be over this fast."

I dipped my head into her hair, drinking in her smell and running soft kisses up her neck. I nipped gently at her ear, and whispered soft 'I love yous' into it. She tightly laced her fingers in my hair—*Mmmmm. I'm beginning to love that*—and pulled my face back to hers. She nipped at my lower lip gently with her teeth in what was becoming a signature Bella move, and it was driving me insane. I instinctively pushed deeper inside of her, which caused both of us to moan softly. Then she slowly kissed her way down my jaw line, to my ear where she whispered something incredibly naughty.

I drew back in astonishment so I could see her face. I chuckled quietly as I spoke. "I hope you meant that figuratively."

I was expecting that alluring blush on her skin, but surprisingly, she wasn't embarrassed at all. She was just staring boldly back at me with a small, knowing smile. *She really means it.*

I chuckled as I trailed kisses softly down her throat. "I'll do my very best."

She laughed in return as my lips moved from her throat down to those two perfect, beautiful mounds. I cupped one in my hand, amazed at how soft and silky her skin was. I spent a long time exploring every inch of them with my fingers, lips and tongue, once again marveling when her nipples hardened in my mouth. *Mmmm. I love how they do that.* She gripped my hair in her fist and pressed my head even harder against her skin, moaning my name and moving her hips upward to meet mine, forcing me even farther inside of her. Her moans were becoming lower and more breathless as she tugged insistently on my hair.

"Edward, please" she pleaded, her breathing quick and husky. She pulled me back to her face, where she devoured my mouth in a frenzy of kisses and tongues. "Please," she begged.

I began moving inside her, quickening the rhythm in response to the frantic movement of her hips against mine. Her heart was pounding with the rush of blood and the sound of it echoed loudly through my head, sending waves of pleasure through my body. I suddenly felt the heat surrounding me intensify. I groaned as she became incredibly tight. She scraped her fingers across my chest and writhed beneath me as I continued my steady rhythm. *This is it!* I watched in awed fascination as the focus left her eyes, and she threw her head back into the pillows. *Control. Keep control.* I watched her fingers try to dig into my chest and her hips thrusting urgently up against mine. *Don't give in to it. Control it, damn it!* I listened as she panted and breathed my name in deep, hoarse gasps. *Control is your middle name, Edward. Hold it!*

Then her entire body shuddered as she hoarsely screamed my name over and over again. Her hot,

rhythmic contractions squeezed my body tightly, threatening to push me over the edge. The blood surged through her, singing my name like the sweetest symphony.

“Oh god, Bella,” I groaned loudly between clenched teeth, as I fought desperately to hold back my own pleasure. I growled in frustration at my own weakness, and was finally forced to pull out before I totally lost it.

Now, only the sound of her labored breathing could be heard in the quiet, dark room. I closed my eyes and listened patiently as her heart beat gradually slowed, and her breathing leveled out. I sighed as I felt her fingers brush lightly through my hair and trace a line down the side of my face to my mouth. And then I heard a small sob escape her lips. My eyes flew open, immediately afraid. Silent tears were streaming down her face. *I've hurt her!*

“What’s wrong?!” I cried out, scared out of my mind that I had damaged her in some way. When she didn’t answer me, I gathered her up in my arms, and sat back on my feet. I pulled her to me, cradling her head in one hand against my chest, and holding her tightly around the waist with the other. Her body shook with sobs, and I had absolutely no idea what was wrong.

“Tell me, please!” I begged her frantically. “Did I hurt you?”

She pulled back and looked up into my eyes. What I saw in her face shocked me. It wasn’t fear. It wasn’t pain. She was from ear to ear as the tears still streamed down her face. *What the hell?* I didn’t have a clue what was going on; I was in over my head.

“Bella, what...?” I asked softly, confused, my hand smoothing her hair in long gentle strokes.

“I’m crying because I’m happy,” she said, her voice hitching. “This is what I’ve always wanted, and I’m just so...so...happy!” she finished, laughing and crying at the same time.

“You’re not hurt?” I asked, doubtfully.

“No. Just the opposite. I’ve never been happier,” she said, smiling. She reached up to wipe the tears from her face, but I stopped her, gently lowering her wrist to her lap.

I pulled her away from me and laid her back down against the pillows. I held my body over hers as before, and then lowered my face to hers. I closed my eyes as I brushed my lips over her cheeks, gently kissing her tears away. They tasted strangely like her scent: slightly floral, but also salty. It was heavenly.

“I love you so much,” she whispered softly.

“I love you, forever and always,” I whispered back to her.

We stared into each other’s eyes for the longest time, not speaking, and occasionally reaching up to push back a lock of hair, stroke a cheek tenderly with a thumb, graze a lip gently with a finger.

“Did you...?” she asked hesitantly. For the first time tonight, the blood pooled in her face in that alluring way I loved.

I smiled. “No. I was too busy watching you.”

The blush deepened and her eyes widened. “No... you didn’t!” She moaned and brought her arm up abruptly and covered her eyes. “How embarrassing.”

“Don’t be embarrassed,” I said as I pulled her arm down from her face. I touched my lips tenderly to hers. “It was the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen.” She still refused to meet my eyes, so I

tugged at her chin. "Don't ever be embarrassed or ashamed about anything we do or say together," I said earnestly. "What happens between us now is just that...between *us*."

After a moment of hesitation she posed a question. "Okay then, do you think you could...do that again?" she asked timidly, with a small smile.

I burst out laughing. "You're so absurd, love." I reached out to tenderly stroke her cheek, and push back a strand of her hair. Her eyebrows were drawn together in a frown. "My silly Bella," I whispered. "I can do this all night. I'm a vampire, remember?"

Edward's O & Bella's Finger

Chapter Summary

The finger scene in this chapter was inspired by the outtakes on the DVD.

She smiled up at me with the most mischievous grin I'd ever seen on her face. "I think I need a human minute first."

"Certainly." I laughed as I rolled over onto my back. "I think I can manage to wait a minute." I closed my eyes and listened to her padding carefully to the bathroom in the darkness.

I listened for a moment to her quiet movements in the small room, and then turned my attention away to give her privacy. I reran the last half hour in my mind like a person watches their favorite part of a movie over and over. My body stirred at the memory, and in anticipation of what the rest of the night might bring.

I was just beginning to consider the various possibilities when I heard her quietly crawl onto the bed. She sat by my side with her legs tucked under her and smiled shyly down at me. A sudden wave of déjà vu hit me, memories of the same poses, the same anticipation, only in a sunlit meadow instead of a darkened bedroom. The feeling only intensified when she spoke.

"You're beautiful," she said softly, her eyes traveling slowly over my body. I was just as aroused now, with the feel of her eyes on my body, as I had been that day so very long ago. We had, in this one intimate moment, come full circle.

"Bella," I said wryly. "Men aren't beautiful."

She placed her hand tenderly on my thigh and sighed. "Oh, yes they are."

And then she began to explore every inch of my body with her hands, her lips and her tongue. I moaned and closed my eyes, wondering when Bella had developed the ability to read my mind. The feel of her lips and hands on my skin had been near the top of the list of the varied possibilities I'd been considering. Her touch had always been able to inflame the passion in me, but tonight it was bringing forth raw lust, the likes of which I'd never experienced before.

I focused on her every movement, following her progress over my body with eyes closed, and hands clenched tight with pleasure. When her hair brushed over my chest, I buried my hands in it and pulled her face to mine, tenderly crushing her mouth with my own. I whispered my love and lust to her in between the frantic kisses, moaning when her tongue darted into my mouth.

She suddenly pulled away, and seconds later proceeded to go straight to the top of my list. I gasped as she took me firmly in her hand, and moaned when I felt her lips touch me. Then I threw my head back and groaned, deeply and loudly, when she took me into her warm mouth.

When I was able, I lifted my head, opened my eyes and nearly lost it when I saw that mass of wavy brown hair spread against my pale skin. So beautiful. I gently pushed it back over her neck with a trembling hand so that I could watch her. Her whisper soft kisses, the light rake of her teeth over me, the heat of her mouth, and the firm, but gentle strokes of her hand brought forth sounds from my throat that I had never heard before: harsh gasps, long, low, drawn-out moans, and softly

whispered profanities.

The intense raw pleasure of it was threatening to rip away my control. I didn't want it to end, so I tugged gently at her hair, silently signaling her to stop. She moaned softly and ignored me.

"Stop!" I whispered harshly, pulling harder now at her hair. She raised her head and looked at me, lust and confusion filling her eyes.

"Am I doing it wrong?" she asked breathlessly. *Why does she always think that way?*

"No," I answered huskily. "You're doing it perfectly. That's the problem." I pulled her gently up to my side and gathered her in my arms. Her head was on my chest now, her legs entwined with mine.

As my breathing slowed, she began drawing imaginary circles on my stomach with her finger. "You liked it?" she asked shyly.

I chuckled quietly at her naiveté. *I loved the hell out of it.* "Oh yeah, liked it," I said suggestively, smiling and gently stroking her hair.

She sighed in contentment, and we lay quietly for a short while, allowing the flames to die down once again. I relaxed and closed my eyes as she continued to aimlessly trace imaginary lines upon my body. It wasn't long before the mindless lust faded away, *completely* away.

Bella raised her head and looked up at me with an unhappy pout. "Edward," she whined, as the giggles began to erupt from her mouth. I let her have her laugh at my expense for a few seconds. Then she cried out laughingly as I playfully grabbed her around the middle and pulled her on top of me. She was straddling my body now, directly above the limp object causing her hysterical giggles. I laughed and pulled her down until her face was inches from mine.

"Vampire, remember?" I whispered, smiling crookedly. She moved her hips suggestively as she teasingly kissed me, nipping at my lower lip with her teeth. I bunched her hair up in my fist as I pulled her mouth onto mine. Her fingers raked through my hair, and I felt myself beginning to harden once again. I sighed into her mouth, and answered her with my own suggestive thrust.

She reached down and guided me into her, then propped her body up with her arms. We both moaned together at our joining. She dropped her head; her hair fell into my face. I inhaled her scent deeply into my lungs and my head spun wildly from the effect. I cupped both her breasts in my hands and kneaded them gently, watching in fascination once again as her nipples hardened beneath my palms.

"Bella," I whispered hoarsely. Her eyes, unfocused and hooded with lust, slowly found mine. I gently pulled her arms up from the bed and brought her entire body down on top of mine. "There's no need for you to do that. Your weight won't hurt me."

She still straddled my hips, but her upper body was now completely lying against mine, her head tucked just beneath my chin. I bent my knees so that she could brace her body against the tops of my thighs. After a few moments of experimentation, we finally found a perfect rocking rhythm. I kissed her hair, softly stroked her back, and kneaded her perfectly round bottom with my hands as we moved slowly together.

The perspiration was beading up on her forehead and neck and I ached to taste it. I gently tugged at her chin until she raised her face to mine. Her eyes were closed and her lips were slightly parted, her breaths coming in soft, rhythmic gasps, mirroring our movements exactly. I trailed my lips down her face, starting at her forehead and continuing down the bridge of her nose, along her

lips, down her jaw line and finally to her neck, savoring the strange floral saltiness that was uniquely Bella's.

When I reached her neck, the rush of her blood filled my head. I moaned and pushed harder into her. The rapid thudding of her heart against my chest, combined with the loud pulsing of her blood echoing inside my head, and the intense heat radiating from her body, stirred something deep inside of me, and it wasn't the monster this time. It was something else, and it was unbelievably powerful.

I was shocked to hear a low growl escape from my mouth as I rolled her over. She was now laying flat on her back with her head on the pillows, and I was once again propped up over her. I lowered my body until there were only a couple of inches of space left between us. I pushed into her with deep, steady thrusts. I listened to her whimpers of pleasure, and matched them with my own harsh gasps, watching in fascination as her body moved up and then back again with each thrust.

I dipped my face down to her neck, still continuing the slow, grinding rhythm. I closed my eyes and listened to the blood rushing through her body, gently running my lips down the side of her neck and along her carotid artery. I could feel the blood pulsing just beneath her skin. I moaned hoarsely as my tongue touched the skin thinly covering it. Waves of pleasure washed over me, so intense that I stopped moving inside her, and focused my entire attention on her neck.

I parted my lips slightly and pulled the skin of her neck gently into my mouth. She sighed and pushed her hips against mine as I gently sucked. *Oh god, the blood.* I could feel it just beneath the skin, so close I could almost taste it. I released her skin and then lightly grazed my teeth down her neck. The sensation caused me to cry out softly and push even harder into her as a jolt of lust raced through me. I nipped at her neck, gently at first, but then with more urgency, pulling her skin up between my teeth and groaning with the rush of pleasure it brought.

My intense focus was suddenly interrupted by Bella repeatedly calling my name. I tried to ignore it, but the urgency in her voice snapped me back to reality. I pulled my face back to hers and reluctantly dragged myself back from the abyss I had almost fallen into. I attempted to focus on Bella's face; she looked confused, and intensely curious.

"Were you going to...bite me?" she asked quietly.

"No," I denied harshly, shaking my head in shock. *Was I? Oh god, I was!*

"Edward. What's wrong?" I didn't answer because I had no idea what was wrong. I just knew something was. "Is it the thirst?"

I shook my head and then added, "No. It's... something else." She was waiting expectantly for an answer, and I gave her the only one I knew at the moment. "The sound of your blood...the thought of it..." I hesitated, unwilling to say this horrible thing aloud.

She raised her eyebrows in question, waiting.

"—is suddenly..." I stopped momentarily, and then whispered the rest. "—very.....erotic."

Her eyes opened wide in shock. "You mean my blood would make this more pleasurable for you?"

"I don't know," I said, helplessly shaking my head. "I'm as new at this as you are." I watched as her thoughts played out on her face. My uneasiness grew in proportion to her smile.

Then she tenderly placed her hand on my face, tracing the outline of my lips with her fingers. "Do

you want a taste?" she asked, smiling suggestively.

"No!" I hissed, my brows drawn together in confusion.

"I think you do." She smiled decadently as she slid two of her fingers deeply into the side of my mouth. I closed my eyes as I felt her warm fingers slide along my tongue and imagined the blood pooling in her fingertips. I didn't want to like it. I fought it, hard. But whatever this was, it was more powerful than me. A moan escaped my lips and I involuntarily moved inside her, which brought a sharp intake of breath from her.

I pulled my head back sharply until her fingers came out of my mouth. "No!" I cried out, refusing to give in to these strange, new feelings. *I will not use her this way for my pleasure. It's sick!*

"It's just us in this room. And you said we should never be embarrassed or ashamed of anything between us," she said quietly.

I just stared back at her, speechless, silently shaking my head. *No! I won't!!*

"It's not the thirst. You said so yourself. You won't hurt me. I trust you. Do it," she said, her voice low and insistent.

My mind was raging against it, but my body was fighting just as hard for it.

She brushed her fingers teasingly over my lips as she whispered, "Do it, Edward."

I want it so badly. I can't believe I'm even considering using her this way. I knew I was going to loathe myself forever for it, but I nodded back at her. She smiled and started to push her fingers back in my mouth, but I stopped her with a shake of my head.

"Not yet." We stared intently into each other's eyes. I was so afraid to do this. I slowly leaned into her and brushed her lips lightly. "I don't want to hurt you," I said in an anguished whisper.

"Please, you'll have more control than I will. Please, don't let it go on too long. Just a taste, that's all. Promise me."

"I trust you," she whispered.

Then she ground her hips into mine and I stopped fighting it. I began moving inside her, quicker now and more urgently. The darkened room was filled with the frantic hushed sounds of our lovemaking: breathy whispers, deep throated moans, soft cries. The pressure was building in me unbelievably fast, and with an unstoppable intensity. I glanced down at Bella, expecting to see her eyes closed in pleasure, but they weren't. Instead, she was staring up at me with lust-hooded eyes, watching, waiting.

She raised her hand to my face, caressing it and brushing her fingers across my mouth. I followed her hand with my lips, kissing her fingers and gasping with pleasure as I continued my frantic rhythm. I was so close. Then I opened my mouth slightly and sought out her fingers. She slid them in deep and I bit down, gently but firmly. She flinched slightly, and then her sweet, warm blood spilled into my mouth. I became overwhelmed all at once with a flood of sensations: the sweet, hot taste of her blood, the tightness of her body, nails scraping skin, hot, rhythmic contractions, cloth ripping, my name screamed over and over, flesh hitting flesh.

And then the world exploded around me as the orgasm ripped violently through my body. I cried out her name as I dug my fingers into the mattress, riding the waves of pleasure that were racing throughout my body as I spilled into her. I buried my face in the pillows to muffle the hoarse, guttural sounds erupting from my throat. Then with one long, intense shudder of my body, it was over. And then there was nothing but the sound of her labored breathing and the thudding of her

heart. Long, silent minutes of nothing but her chest rising and falling, air quietly rushing in and out of her lungs.. Eyes closed. No speaking. No thinking.

finally pulled my face up from the pillows just enough to open one eye and glance sideways at her. Her eyes were closed, the sweat was beaded on her face, and she had a small, satisfied smile on her lips. I smiled and started to say something to her, but realized that there was something in my mouth. I quietly spit it out and saw, with surprise, that it was a feather. *What the hell?*

I opened both eyes and looked around me. All the pent-up tension of the past hours rushed out of me in one long deluge as I quietly laughed. I did it! And without hurting her! I'd tasted her blood and she was still alive to tell about it! Sex with Bella was the most intense and amazing thing I'd ever experienced...and her hair was covered in feathers!

"What's so funny?" she mumbled.

"You cry, I laugh." I answered, grinning.

I rolled over onto my back and searched in the darkness for her hand. I glanced over at her; her eyes were still closed. My body was so relaxed. It must be the "afterglow" everyone talked about. I closed my eyes and just enjoyed the hell out of it. While I lay there, I felt for the first time in my vampire life that if I let go, I might just be able to fall asleep. My body was drifting away, my mind right along with it. Peaceful. Contented. Relaxed.

"Edward?" she said softly into the stillness of the room, bringing me back from the brink of complete serenity.

"Mmmm?" I murmured.

"I need another human minute," she said with a small chuckle.

"Of course...and Bella?" I hesitated before continuing. "Just don't turn on the lights. Wouldn't want to spoil the moment, would we?" I had ulterior motives for not wanting the lights on just yet. I felt guilty as I admitted to myself that I didn't want her to see the mess I'd made of her hair.

I waited until I heard the bathroom door close before I sat up and hurriedly surveyed the damage. Two of the pillows were torn to shreds. *Damn.* I quickly gathered up the remnants and stuffed them under the bed. Then I shook my head violently from side to side, shaking loose the stray feathers from my own hair. I gathered up all the feathers I could find on the bed at vampire speed and thrust them between the two mattresses. The ones all over the floor would have to wait. That taken care of, I swiftly raked my eyes over the bed, looking for further damage. I groaned as I saw two huge strips of the white sheet ripped to pieces where my hands had been. Beneath, tufts of white cotton batting poked up from holes in the mattress, also where my hands had been. Sorry Esme. I made a mental note to replace the mattress before we left. I hurriedly pulled the comforter up over the damage, plumped up the pillows, and was lying back on them nonchalantly when the bathroom door opened again.

I turned over onto my side as she approached the bed. She crawled over and stretched out next to me. Our faces were inches from each other, our legs entwined together. I gently tucked her hair behind her shoulders. Then I caught the scent of her fresh blood.

"You're still bleeding," I said nervously.

She sighed. "I know, but I couldn't see in the dark to see if you had any bandaids. Anyway, I don't need them."

She held her fingers up to my face. Two exquisite blood droplets had formed over the small gashes. She looked expectantly at me and then smiled as I slowly brought her fingers to my mouth and gently kissed the blood from them. I closed my eyes and sighed at the taste of it, the smell of it and the sensations it sent through my body. Then she pulled my face to hers and kissed me deeply. I wondered if she could taste her own blood in my mouth.

“Edward, I know you. I know how you think. I don’t want you to feel any guilt over what you did. You wanted it and I wanted it. I think it made it better for both of us. This is part of who you are. I accepted it a long time ago. You have to know that I love everything about you, even that,” she said, her voice shaking with emotion.

I didn’t speak. I was so touched by her words, but I shouldn’t have been surprised at her understanding. She’d always been so accepting of who I was, what I was.

“Am I going to be like you now?” she asked timidly.

“No, I told you, it wasn’t the thirst. There was no venom in my mouth.”

“What was it like?” she asked, curiosity filling her eyes.

I stroked her body lightly with my fingers as I struggled to explain how that moment had felt. “It was so different from the last time. Then, I was trying to save your life, and I hadn’t gained the control over the thirst that I have now. The frenzy then was so powerful. I really almost didn’t stop.” I mentally shuddered at how close I had come to saving her from James and then almost killing her myself.

“Tonight, it was...” I searched my mind for the appropriate word. The task was almost impossible. “—more...intimate,” I finished, frustrated, because that didn’t even begin to describe it. “When I tasted your blood, it made me feel...complete...for the first time in my life,” I whispered. And that still didn’t do it justice. I decided to just give up. Mere words weren’t enough. But there were two important words that needed to be said.

“Thank you,” I said. Her eyes were suddenly brimming with tears that tugged at my heart. “Don’t cry, please.” When she blinked, I wiped them from her cheeks. “Did I hurt you in any way? Well, except for the fingers,” I asked cautiously. I had made a quick survey of her body when she’d returned from the bathroom. I hadn’t seen any obvious damage, except her lips were slightly swollen, and that was understandable since I had kissed the hell out of them tonight.

She smiled and shook her head. I sighed inwardly in relief. Her fingers began to lightly trace the contours of my body, causing chill bumps to rise on my skin. “Do you know what my favorite part of your body is?” she asked.

I bit my lip as I grinned knowingly back at her. *Oh yeah...*

“Your eyes,” she said.

I brought my hand up to my heart in mock indignation. “My eyes? Aah, now you’ve hurt my feelings,” I said, chuckling.

It took her a moment to get it, and then she laughed right along with me. “I love that part of you too, of course, but your eyes...” she continued, more serious now. “They’ve fascinated me since the very beginning. They’re so expressive, and the way they change color. So beautiful. I’ll bet you didn’t know that their color deepens when you...when you’re...,” she stammered, the blush creeping up her neck to her face. *How can she be embarrassed after everything we’ve done together tonight?*

“Really?” I asked, surprised. I’d never known that about myself before. It seemed tonight was a night for curious discoveries. “My lovemaking must have been lacking if you had time to idly watch my eyes change colors.”

She laughed and playfully slapped at my chest. “Quit fishing for compliments. You know you were spectacular.”

I chuckled as she once again saw through my pretenses.

“So, which of my body parts do you like the best?” she asked slyly.

“Mmmm. It’s so difficult to choose,” I said suggestively.

I reached out and barely touched my fingertip to her nipple. It instantly hardened. “Those fascinate me. I could watch them do that all day,” I said, sighing.

Then I reached up and gently stroked her hair, reaching underneath it to caress the back of her neck. Her hair was so beautiful—long, thick, wavy masses of brown, and now white. I smiled at the feathers scattered all throughout her hair. My beautiful white swan. “I love your hair. Did you know the scent of it changes when it’s wet, or damp from perspiration?”

I trailed my fingers up her neck, along her jaw line, to her lips. I ran my thumb lightly along her bottom lip, and they parted slightly in response. I leaned in and very lightly kissed her. “These—“ I kissed her top lip. “—are my absolute—“ I gently sucked on her bottom lip. “—favorite.” I kissed them both again lightly, and then pulled back from her. As much as I wanted to indulge myself, I didn’t think they could take much more kissing.

“Mmmmm,” she purred in contentment. I laughed quietly. I’d never heard her purr before. It was the most luscious sound.

We both fell silent. I found her hand in the darkness, brought it up between us, and entwined my fingers in hers. We gazed at each other, each thinking our own thoughts. Occasionally we kissed or lightly touched each other. I watched as her eyes grew heavy and her body began to relax, inch by lovely inch. It fascinated me, as always, to watch sleep overtake her, but tonight it saddened me more than it ever had. I wasn’t ready for her to go.

“Bella,” I whispered, gently shaking her shoulder. “Don’t leave me yet.”

Her eyes slowly opened, and she smiled sleepily. I brushed her hair back from her forehead. “I’m so tired...and happy,” she whispered, as her eyes closed once again.

I sighed in the darkness. *She’s had a long night, and she is human, after all.* I absent-mindedly picked a feather from her hair as I drank in the sight of her in the moonlight. I thought briefly about picking them all out before she awoke, but I couldn’t bring myself to do it. They made her look almost angelic.

I gently pulled her body over to mine. She stirred briefly, long enough to throw her arm across my chest, tuck her head under my chin, and entwine her legs in mine. I held her in my arms and listened to her quiet, restful breathing. I wondered if she would talk to me in her dreams tonight. I hoped so.

She sighed softly and tucked herself even closer to my body. I gazed at her in wonder, still amazed that she was mine now, mine forever. I made a vow in that moment, a vow to her, to *us*. Nothing or no one would ever hurt Bella or try to take her away from me again. I simply wouldn’t allow it.

“Il mio cuore. La mia vita. La mia anima...per sempre,” I whispered softly into her hair.

Bruises

Chapter Notes

This chapter shares some dialogue text with Stephenie Meyer's *Breaking Dawn*. It is not meant as plagiarism. All characters are the sole property of Stephenie Meyer.

I closed my eyes and spent the next hours reliving our lovemaking in my mind, while Bella slept peacefully in my arms. I never imagined that sex could be like that. No wonder Emmett and Rose were all over each other all the time. Never again would I look upon their shameless displays of affection with the same derision I once had. In this instance, experience had definitely been the best teacher.

I smiled to myself as I imagined what the next days, and possibly weeks, held for us. It would be nice to explore the island; there were so many wondrous sights I wanted to show her. Our nights we'd spend making love, as much as possible, in as many places as possible. I never thought that we would ever be able to enjoy each other's bodies in this way, and I could hardly wait to be with her again. I'd foolishly thought I couldn't love her any more than I did on the day of our wedding, but now, our love had transcended anything that had come before. She was more than my life now. She was my soul, the only soul I could ever be certain of having.

I sighed with contentment and relaxed my body into perfect stillness. I lay with my eyes closed, unmoving, while she slept. She never once stirred or murmured in her sleep. I missed the talking, but I wasn't going to complain. At least I would never again have to leave her alone at night.

Hours later, I finally stirred as the hot, bright sunshine of the day filled the room. The heat that flowed over my nude body was exquisite. I could tell that Bella was still sleeping, so I indulged myself for awhile in the warmth, like a cat curled up in a sunbeam.

A whisper of a sigh from Bella's lips finally roused me into awareness. I slowly opened my eyes to the new day, our second as husband and wife. Out of habit, I immediately glanced down to check on her. I froze and stared at her body in stunned disbelief. She was covered in mottled, purple bruises.

A quiet, ice-cold anger began to creep slowly through me as I surveyed the damage I'd done. I gently pulled her from me and lay her back on the pillows. I slid off the bed and walked slowly around to her side, never taking my eyes off of her. I stood silently beside her with fists clenched. The cold anger was heating now as it moved through me, threatening to erupt into a fiery ball of rage.

My gaze traveled slowly over her, inch by inch, starting with the light bruise over her cheekbone. How had I done that? Her lips were more swollen now than they were earlier. I reached out and gingerly pushed back the hair from her neck and saw the bruising where I had sucked on her skin and started to bite her. Small, rounded purple marks that perfectly matched my fingertips were sprinkled all over her shoulders, arms, ribs, and even around her breasts. Her hand was lying across her stomach, and I could see scabs starting to form over the small gashes on her fingers. Purple shadows of my hand prints were visible on her thighs, and that was just what I could see. Had I damaged her inside? I quickly assessed the damage to myself and was disgusted to realize that I only suffered minor scratches from Bella's nails, and those, of course, were nearly healed. I

truly was a monster for allowing this to happen.

The rage inside me was reaching the boiling point now. I slowly backed away from the bed and dropped into a chair in the corner of the room, my hands clenched into tight fists. I had never been so ashamed, disgusted and enraged with myself as I was at that very moment. I felt an almost overwhelming need to take my anger out on something. I wanted to rip things apart and scream obscenities to the heavens. I imagined myself racing from the room and running to the furthest part of the island on a rampage of anger and destruction, ripping everything in my path to pieces.

I squeezed my eyes shut and concentrated every ounce of my strength on focusing my thoughts in a more positive direction. I kept telling myself over and over that there was nothing to gain from losing my temper. *It won't change what I've done to Bella, it won't change what I am. It won't change what I've done to Bella, it won't change what I am. It won't change what I've done to Bella, it won't change what I am.* Finally, after an interminable amount of time spent repeating the mantra in my head, I began to calm down.

I finally felt in control enough to open my eyes, and winced again at the sight of her bruised body. And I'd thought I was being gentle. I silently cursed myself for breaking the promise I had made to her just hours ago. I'd promised her no one would ever hurt her again. Who exactly was I thinking I was protecting her from? It'd always been me that was the biggest threat to her... always. Or if not me, then someone or something associated with me.

What the hell had I been thinking? I should have never let her talk me into this. I'd known better. I'd reached a new level of selfishness, even for me. It was my own fault, though. I'd always given Bella everything she'd wanted, no matter the consequences. I'd let my desire to please her cloud my reason. *Edward, why don't you just admit it. You wanted it as much as she did. You could have talked her out of it if you'd tried.*

What am I going to do now? I knew Bella. She'd forgive me like she always did. She forgave me even when I didn't deserve it. It was ridiculous the things she'd forgiven me for, the worst of which was when I'd ripped her heart out last year. I hadn't meant to hurt her; I'd just done what I'd thought was best for her at the time, but it had nearly killed her nonetheless. I didn't know if I'd ever be able to make that up to her.

No, I'd bruised her heart enough, and there was nothing I could do about it now, but I would NOT bruise her body. That I could do something about. *I simply will not make love to her again until she is changed. Period. Nothing she can say or do will change my mind.* The rage that had previously threatened to consume me now coalesced into a hard ball of resolve deep in the pit of my stomach. Nothing would break it, now that I had made up my mind.

I sighed and looked over at her again. Sweat was beginning to bead up on her face and arms. A trickle of it was running down the valley between her breasts. *She's getting overheated. She needs me.* I silently crossed the room and called upon my newfound resolve as I lay down beside her. I pulled her body gently against mine. She sighed in her sleep, but didn't awaken.

I couldn't bear to look at what I'd done, so I fixed my gaze on the ceiling and waited for her to wake. The warmth of her pressed up against me, the soft silkiness of her skin, the perfume of her scent filling my senses and the memories of the past hours tormented me. How I wanted her, even now. Even after what I'd done, I still wanted her. I cursed my traitorous body as I lay with her, fighting my need to make love to her again as soon as she woke. It wasn't going to be easy, but I could do it. I'd resisted much worse than this and for much longer.

Suddenly her breathing changed; it was no longer regular and steady, and her heartbeat had quickened slightly. She was awake. I trailed my fingers lightly down her spine, barely touching her skin. It was so soft and silky and the feel of it made my need even more difficult to control.

She reached her arms up around my neck and squeezed tightly. Her eyes were still closed. *I can't even imagine the pain she must be in.* I was startled when she unexpectedly laughed.

"What's funny?" I murmured to her. What could possibly be funny at this moment? I felt the heat rising in her face. She was blushing, but over what, I couldn't even imagine. Then her stomach growled loudly.

"I just can't escape being human for very long." She laughed again. I wasn't in the mood for her human jokes right now, so I continued to stare at the ceiling and ignored her attempt to lighten my mood.

"Edward, what is it? What's wrong?" she asked, her voice catching.

"You have to ask?" I retorted angrily. Surely she could tell by now that I had injured her. I glanced down at her then. Her brow was wrinkled, but why? Was she in pain? Confused? Angry? I took my finger and lightly rubbed the worry lines from her forehead. "What are you thinking?" I whispered.

"You're upset. I don't understand. Did I...?" She stopped. Did I what? I once again felt the familiar frustration at not knowing what she was thinking. I shook it off; that wasn't the most important thing at the moment.

"How badly are you hurt? The truth. Don't try to downplay it," I said, barely disguising the disgust I felt at myself.

"Hurt?" she asked, sounding surprised. I raised my eyebrow and stared back at her, my lips pressed together in a tight line.

I guess my expression spoke volumes because then she started checking her body, stretching and flexing her muscles one by one. After her examination was complete, she looked up at me innocently.

"Why would you jump to that conclusion? I've never been better than I am now."

I closed my eyes, angry at her for doing exactly what I knew she'd do. She was going to pretend nothing was wrong, or worse, she was going to acknowledge her pain and then forgive me for it. "Stop that," I said, my voice low and thick.

She raised her voice slightly as she spoke. "Stop what?"

"Stop acting like I'm not a monster for having agreed to this," I said flatly.

"Edward!" she whispered. "Don't ever say that." She sounded angry. *Good. She should be angry.* Her anger was what I really deserved, not her forgiveness.

I closed my eyes, unable to bear her reaction when she finally realized what I'd done. "Look at yourself and then tell me I'm not a monster." I listened for a few seconds and then heard what I'd been dreading: a soft gasp escaped her lips. No doubt she'd finally seen the extensive damage I had inflicted on her body in my attempt to be gentle.

"Why am I covered in feathers?" she asked in a confused voice. I exhaled the breath I'd been unconsciously holding.

"I bit a pillow. Or two. That's not what I'm talking about," I said impatiently.

"You...bit a pillow? Why?" she asked incredulously.

Who cares about the pillows?! What is wrong with her?! I barely contained the angry growl that almost escaped my throat. “Look, Bella!” I very gingerly took her hand and stretched her arm out. “Look at that.”

I watched as reality finally sunk in. She examined her body more closely now, occasionally poking at a bruise, watching as it faded and then reappeared. I lightly placed my hand against the bruises on her arm, matching my fingers, one at a time, to the pattern there. I raised my eyes to her and saw the understanding finally dawn in them.

“Oh,” she said quietly.

I gently raised her hand again, and silently showed her the scabs forming on her fingers. I lightly brushed back her hair. She winced as I barely touched the discoloration on her neck. I held my breath and asked the one question I was terrified to ask. “Did I hurt you...anywhere else?”

She looked at me with a frown.

“Did I hurt you...inside?” I whispered. She shook her head silently, her brows drawn together in confusion. *Is she telling me the truth?* “I’m...so sorry. I knew better than this. I should not have —.” I growled softly as I thought of what could have happened and how naïve I had been. I threw my arm over my face to keep her from seeing the shame in my eyes.

There was nothing but silence for several moments, and then she gently touched my arm. *Don’t Bella. Leave me alone.* Then she wrapped her fingers around my wrist and tried to pull my arm off my face. She should’ve known better.

“Edward.” I silently ignored her. “Edward?” I still ignored her.

“I’m not sorry, Edward. I’m...I can’t even tell you. I’m so happy. That doesn’t cover it. Don’t be angry. Don’t. I’m really f—.” I interrupted her before she could say the one word that would push me over the edge.

The anger welled up in me in an instant. “Do not say the word fine. If you value my sanity, do not say that you are fine,” I said coldly. I was not going to allow her to brush this off so easily.

“But I am,” she whispered.

“Bella,” I moaned. “Don’t.”

“No. You don’t, Edward,” she said angrily. She almost sounded indignant. I moved my arm and watched her warily. “Don’t ruin this,” she said. “I. Am. Happy.”

“I’ve already ruined this,” I whispered.

“Cut it out, Edward!” she snapped.

I ground my teeth together in frustration. What was wrong with her? I wanted her to be angry with me. I wanted her to scream at me, curse at me. I wanted her to finally see what a monster I really was. *Why can’t she ever react to things the way she’s supposed to?*

“Ugh!” she groaned. “Why can’t you just read my mind already? It’s so inconvenient to be a mental mute.”

Really? I was momentarily distracted by this change in attitude. “That’s a new one. You love that I can’t read your mind,” I said cautiously.

“Not today,” she replied.

I just stared at her, uncomprehending. “Why?”

She threw her hands up in frustration and then smacked me on the chest with both palms. “Because all this angst would be completely unnecessary if you could see how I feel right now! Or five minutes ago, anyway. I was perfectly happy. Totally and completely blissed out. Now—well, I’m sort of pissed, actually.”

“You should be angry at me,” I agreed.

“Well, I am. Does that make you feel better?” she asked.

I sighed at that. “No, I don’t think anything could make me feel better now.”

“That,” she snapped angrily. “That right there is why I’m angry. You are killing my buzz, Edward!”

I rolled my eyes and shook my head at her incomprehensible logic. It was useless to argue with her. She just refused to accept the idea that I had completely messed up our honeymoon and hurt her in the process.

“We knew this was going to be tricky. I thought that was assumed. And then—well, it was a lot easier than I thought it would be. And this is really nothing,” she said soothingly as she brushed her fingers along her bruised arm. “I think for a first time, not knowing what to expect, we did amazing. With a little practice—”

As I listened to her I felt the rage rise up in me again. She must have seen how livid I was because her sentence trailed off into silence. “Assumed? Did you expect this, Bella? Were you anticipating that I would hurt you? Were you thinking it would be worse?” My voice raised in anger as I continued. “Do you consider the experiment a success because you can walk away from it? No broken bones—that equals a victory?”

She stared silently back at me. *It’s really hard to stay angry at someone if they won’t get angry back*, I realized. So, eventually, I calmed myself and just stared right back at her.

“I didn’t know what to expect—but I definitely did not expect how...how...just wonderful and perfect it was,” she said. Then her voice dropped to a whisper and her eyes slipped from mine, down to her hands. “I mean, I don’t know how it was for you, but it was like that for me.”

I tugged gently at her chin, even though the anger was still raging through me. “Is that what you’re worried about?” I asked through clenched teeth. “That I didn’t enjoy myself?”

Even though I pulled her chin up, she still refused to meet my eyes. “I know it’s not the same,” she whispered. “You’re not human. I just was trying to explain that, for a human, well, I can’t imagine that life gets any better than that.”

My anger faded as, once again, her logic confounded me. How could she possibly think I hadn’t enjoyed our lovemaking? What could make her think that it wasn’t just as pleasurable for me? Being human, or not, had absolutely nothing to do with it. She’d been there! Surely she knew that the sounds that came out of my mouth last night were the result of intense pleasure like nothing I’d ever known before! It would be just like her to blame herself if she felt I didn’t enjoy it. If only I could describe to her in words just how intense it had been and how much I wanted her right now, this very minute.

"It seems that I have more to apologize for." I frowned. "I didn't dream that you would construe the way I feel about what I did to you to mean that last night wasn't...well, the best night of my existence. But I don't want to think of it that way, not when you were..."

She interrupted me with a small smile. "Really? The best ever?" she asked in an even smaller voice.

I took her face gently between my hands and looked into her eyes. "I spoke to Carlisle after you and I made our bargain, hoping he could help me. Of course he warned me that this would be very dangerous for you." I frowned as I remembered him telling me that if anyone could do this safely, I could. "He had faith in me, though—faith I didn't deserve," She started to protest, of course, but I put two fingers over her mouth before she could comment.

"I also asked him what I should expect. I didn't know what it would be like for me...what with my being a vampire." I smiled halfheartedly at the memory of our conversation that day. "Carlisle told me it was a very powerful thing, like nothing else. He told me physical love was something I should not treat lightly. With our rarely changing temperaments, strong emotions can alter us in permanent ways. But he said I did not need to worry about that part—you had already altered me so completely." I smiled at the profound truth in that statement.

"I spoke to my brothers, too. They told me it was a very great pleasure. Second only to drinking human blood. But I've tasted your blood twice now, and there could be no blood more potent than that. I don't think they were wrong, really, just that it was different for us. Something more." *Yeah, Jasper...Emmett! It would have been nice if you'd have mentioned the blood/sex thing.*

"It was more. It was everything," she said quietly.

I stroked her hair softly. "That doesn't change the fact that it was wrong. Even if it were possible that you really did feel that way," I sighed.

"What does that mean? Do you think I'm making this up? Why?" she asked incredulously.

"To ease my guilt. I can't ignore the evidence, Bella. Or your history of trying to let me off the hook when I make mistakes."

Then she roughly grabbed my chin and pulled my face to hers. "You listen to me, Edward Cullen, I am not pretending anything for your sake, okay? I didn't even know there was a reason to make you feel better until you started being all miserable. I've never been so happy in my life—I wasn't this happy when you decided that you loved me more that you wanted to kill me, or the first morning I woke up and you were there waiting for me...Not when I heard your voice in the ballet studio"—I flinched at the mention of that horrible time when I thought I was going to be too late—"or when you said 'I do' and I realized that, somehow, I get to keep you forever. Those are the happiest memories I have, and this is better than any of it. So just deal with it," she finished emphatically, with a frown creasing her forehead.

I touched the frown line between her eyebrows. "I'm making you unhappy now. I don't want to do that."

"Then don't you be unhappy. That's the only thing that's wrong here," she said.

"You're right. The past is past and I can't do anything to change it. There's no sense in letting my mood sour this time for you. I'll do whatever I can to make you happy now."

"Whatever makes me happy?" she asked, smiling. It was right then that her stomach once again growled loudly. *Perfect timing.* I knew exactly what she was hinting at.

"You're hungry," I said quickly, sitting up and inadvertently stirring up a cloud of feathers.

"So, why exactly did you decide to ruin Esme's pillows?" she asked as she sat up and shook the feathers from her hair.

I pulled on a pair of khaki pants and ran my fingers through my own hair, only dislodging a couple of feathers. Luckily, I'd gotten most of them out last night. "I don't know if I decided to do anything last night," I muttered. "We're just lucky it was the pillows and not you." I shook off such thoughts before they could depress me again. Time to forget the past and concentrate on just making her happy.

She slid off the bed, turned her back to me and stretched. I gasped at what had been hidden from me as she lay on her back. Bruises caused by my hands and fingertips were splattered down her back and across her bottom. The rage filled me again. I growled softly and turned away from her, my hands once again clenched in tight fists.

"Do I look that hideous?" she asked lightly. She was trying to keep her tone light, trying not to upset me again, trying not to make me feel like the monster I was. I heard her walk to the bathroom and told myself not to follow her, but when I heard her groan, I was behind her in an instant. *She's in pain.*

"Bella?" I asked, frightened at the sound that had escaped her lips.

"I'll never get this all out of my hair!" She groaned and pointed at the mess of feathers stuck in her hair. She started to pick them out one-by-one. She'd be here all day at that rate. I began picking them out much more quickly.

"You would be worried about your hair," I mumbled.

"How did you keep from laughing at this? I look ridiculous," she asked. It had been pretty funny at the time, and then later...beautiful.

"This isn't going to work," she sighed after a minute. "It's all dried in. I'm going to have to try to wash it out." She turned around then and wrapped her arms around my waist, pressing her hips against mine. "Do you want to help me?" she asked suggestively.

The images that scenario conjured up in my mind nearly broke my resolve. What would it be like to stand under a warm shower with her, run my hands over her soapy body, and smell her scent mixed with the steam? I imagined myself washing her hair for her, burying my hands in it, smelling the perfume of it in the hot room. And I imagined even more.... *No, Edward. No more bruises...remember?*

"I'd better find some food for you," I said quietly as I unwound her arms gently from my waist. I disappeared quickly from the room before I could give in to the temptation.

While she was dressing, I gathered the ingredients from the refrigerator to make Bella her first breakfast as my wife. I knew she could cook for herself, but I wanted to learn to do this small thing for her. So Esme and I had spent lots of evenings in front of the television, watching the Food Network. Together, we'd selected dishes we'd thought looked appetizing (for Bella, at least), based on the foods I'd seen her eat in the past. We'd bought the ingredients and ventured into our pristine kitchen to prepare them together. Of course, Esme and I had never eaten what we'd cooked. The point had been for me to practice the preparation and successfully recreate an edible entrée. Once, on a lark, I'd ventured to taste one of the dishes I had prepared. It had been visually attractive, with the little sprigs of parsley and lemon wedges. I'd never made that mistake again. I could only hope that Bella would, if nothing else, appreciate the thought that went into it.

By the time she padded into the kitchen, I had finished cooking her cheddar cheese and bacon omelet. As I turned around and slid it out of the pan onto the light blue plate on the table, I noticed the white cotton dress she was wearing. *Does she realize how thin that fabric is?? Is she aware that I can see completely through it?* I groaned inwardly at my own weakness. My resolve was going to crumble away like dust if I didn't pull myself together.

"Here," I said, smiling as I presented her with her first Mrs. Cullen breakfast. I carefully kept my eyes averted, restricting them to areas above her neck. To look any farther down would be my undoing. I watched as she hungrily devoured my breakfast like a starving man. I was shocked, frankly, at her increased appetite. "I'm not feeding you often enough."

She swallowed the mouthful of food before she spoke. "I was asleep. This is really good, by the way. Impressive for someone who doesn't eat," she said, smiling.

"Food Network... and Esme."

"Where did the eggs come from?" she asked between bites.

"I asked the cleaning crew to stock the kitchen. A first, for this place. I'll have to ask them to deal with the feathers..." I trailed off, as the events of last night filled my head. *I'll never look at feather pillows the same again...*

She thanked me as she cleaned up the last morsel of food on her plate. Then she leaned across the table to kiss me. I kissed her back automatically, and then suddenly stiffened as my eyes took in the view from her gaping neckline. I silently clenched my jaw tight and leaned away from her.

"You aren't going to touch me again while we're here, are you?" she asked accusingly through gritted teeth.

I hesitated, not sure what to say. Instead of speaking, I raised my hand and tenderly stroked her cheek. She leaned her face into my palm and looked back at me accusingly.

"You know that's not what I meant," she said quietly.

I sighed and dropped my hand. "I know. And you're right." I paused, calling on my resolve once again. I lifted my chin slightly when I continued. "I will not make love with you until you've been changed. I will never hurt you again," I said with conviction.

As I was to soon find out, some things were easier said than done.

Dolphins & Cliffs Sunset

Chapter Notes

In the book, SM mentioned "distractions" to keep Bella's mind off of sex. I decided to expand each of these distractions into their own chapter...to keep the angst going. lol

As Bella put her breakfast dishes into the dishwasher and tidied up the kitchen, I ran down my mental list of activities I had planned for us to do. Since half of the day was already gone, it would be better to use today to visit the porpoises.

"Would you like to swim with the dolphins today?" I asked tentatively. "There's a school that frequents the shallow waters about a quarter of a mile up the beach."

She shrugged. "I guess." After a few moments of wiping the table, she finally folded the towel and laid it by the sink. Then she sighed loudly, turned to face me and placed her hands on her hips. "So what does a person wear to swim with dolphins?" she asked with a small smile. I was relieved to see that she was no longer angry with me.

"I don't suppose Alice packed you a wet suit?" I asked with a smirk.

She laughed. "Hardly. I'll just pick one of the thousand bathing suits she sent."

As she started down the hallway to the bedroom to change, I reminded her to take a cover-up and some sunscreen. With her pale skin, she'd be burnt in a matter of minutes. While she was changing, I packed some crackers, an apple and several bottles of water into a backpack to take along with us. I worried that I wasn't feeding her enough, and I was determined to be prepared from now on.

When I walked into the bedroom, she was dressed and ready to go. I could see the outline of a dark-colored swimsuit underneath the knee-length white cotton cover-up she had on. She had grabbed a blanket out of the cedar chest and had it draped across her arm.

"Are you wearing that?" she asked with a crooked smile. I looked down at my baggy khaki shorts, wondering what could possibly be wrong with them.

"Sure. They'll do. I won't be swimming with you today anyway."

"Why not?" she asked, pouting.

I kissed her lightly on the lips and laughed. "You'll see."

She put the sunscreen down into my backpack, linked her arm in mine, and smiled up at me as we walked out into the bright sunshine. The walk to the shallow inlet took only fifteen minutes. When we reached our destination, we spread the blanket out on the sand and sat down for her to rest. Sweat was starting to bead on her skin, so I pressed the back of my cool hand to her forehead. She smiled, closed her eyes and sighed in comfort.

After a few minutes, she dug into the backpack for the sunscreen. She pulled off her cover-up, and smiled shyly at me. "Would you rub this on my back?"

I took a mental deep breath and reached for the bottle. "Sure. No problem." I smiled back. The dark blue swimsuit she was wearing left very little to the imagination, and my imagination was already working overtime this morning.

I poured some white cream onto her shoulders and began rubbing it into her skin. I tried to ignore the bruises as I moved my hands down her back toward the top of her bikini bottom. I should have been angry as hell as I ran my fingers over the light purple blotches. Instead, I felt my body starting to respond to the feel of her skin beneath my touch. *Damn*. I couldn't even do this one simple thing without losing it.

"I think you're good back here," I said quickly. "Maybe you should do the rest."

She turned around and smiled. "Thanks," she said quietly.

I watched as she slowly spread the sunscreen over every inch of her body. I followed her every move as her fingers worked the lotion into her skin. My eyes saw the bruises, but somehow my mind shut out the images. I never knew applying sunscreen could be so sensual. I tore my gaze away from her and looked off into the distance. I began telling her about the dolphins, hoping that would take my mind off of things I shouldn't be thinking about.

"When you go into the water, wade in about waist deep. Walk slowly and don't make any sudden movements. You may have to stand a little while until they notice you, but don't walk or swim toward them. Let them come to you."

"What will they do?" she asked curiously.

"They'll come up to you to see what you are, investigate you. They may brush by you and graze your skin, but that's just their way of getting to know you. Just don't do anything sudden that will frighten them."

"Aren't you coming with me?" she asked.

"Not yet. I'll just watch you for awhile. Maybe I'll come in later."

She rose up off the blanket and started walking tentatively into the water. About halfway out, she turned and waved back at me, smiling.

I sat in the warm sun for the next half hour or so and watched as she got acquainted with two particularly curious and friendly Spinners. They swam around her playfully, occasionally bumping her lightly as they passed. She laughed in surprise as one of them rose up out of the water in front of her. They gave her plenty of opportunities to touch them and rub their backs. She squealed loudly as one did a spinning turn up out of the water, and landed near her, drenching her in the process. I grew a little anxious when she accidentally fell over into the water when one bumped her a little too hard, but she came back to the surface momentarily, laughing and sputtering, and rubbing the salt from her eyes.

"Come out, Edward!" she shouted to me, laughing.

Since a dolphin's attention span is not much more than twenty minutes, I didn't feel too bad about joining her in the water now. As soon as I had waded in about halfway, the dolphins suddenly swam away, looking for safer waters in which to play.

"They all left!" Bella wailed as she turned slowly in circles looking for her lost playmates.

"They're smart." I said as I finally reached her side.

“What’s that supposed to mean?” she asked quizzically.

I turned to face her in the water and grabbed her hand, entwining my fingers in hers. “They instinctively recognize me for what I am: a predator.” She looked at me, her brows drawn together in confusion. “Everything in nature runs away from me,” I said with a dismayed smile.

She scowled. “So, are you saying a dolphin is smarter than I am?”

“Most definitely,” I said with a laugh. “But I’m glad you didn’t run away.” I kissed her softly on the forehead. She leaned into me and laid her head against my chest. I was suddenly reminded of last night and the brief, but pleasurable, time we’d spent in the water. I pulled her gently off my chest, and started walking back to the shore. She followed reluctantly, as I tugged at her hand.

“So I guess this means we can’t get a dog?” she asked ironically as she splashed through the water behind me.

I laughed loudly at her. She could be so amusing at times. “No, sorry. Vampires don’t have pets.”

When she reached the blanket, she plopped down to rest. She drank the water I’d packed for her and ate a pack of crackers. She sunbathed for awhile, against my better judgment. She frowned frequently at me when I made her turn over every fifteen minutes.

Later, we walked the beach looking for seashells. I laughed at her squeals of delight when she would find a particularly colorful shell. This part of the beach was littered with cockle and scallop shells of a variety of colors. She filled the pockets of her cover-up and tried to put more into the backpack before I stopped her.

“Love, what are you going to do with all of those shells?”

“I want to keep them so I can remember how beautiful this place is. You know, for when we’re back in Forks,” she said, more serious now. “When it’s gray and raining, they’ll help me remember the sun, and all the bright colors here.”

We walked silently for a while longer, before she suddenly stopped and turned to me. “Did you know that Aphrodite, the Greek goddess of love, was supposed to have been born out of a scallop shell?” she asked softly, looking up at me from under her lashes. *Is she flirting with me?*

I smiled crookedly back at her. “Actually, I did know that,” I said, gently stroking her cheek with my thumb. We stared into each others eyes for a few moments before I pulled myself together. “And I know a lot of other legends about seashells.” I smiled and dropped my hand. “Want to hear them?”

“No,” she pouted. She dropped her eyes, and then looked invitingly up at me through her lashes... again. *She IS flirting!* “I just want you to kiss me,” she whispered.

I bent down and briefly kissed her cheek. She turned her face quickly to mine so that our lips brushed ever so quick.

“Please... kiss me, Edward,” she breathed against my mouth. “A *real* kiss.”

I hesitated for a moment, steeled myself mentally, and then pressed my lips to hers. I explored her mouth tenderly as if it were our very first kiss. The light brush of her tongue along my lips sent a rush of lust through my body. Then, she kissed me lightly along my jaw and down my neck, feather light kisses that caused chill bumps to rise on my skin, despite the oppressive heat. I buried my hand in her hair, and pulled her face back to mine. My breathing quickened as I brushed my

lips lightly over hers.

It was then that her stomach growled loud enough for both of us to hear. “Bella,” I murmured between kisses. “I heard that.”

“I didn’t hear anything.” She gasped as her tongue found its way into my mouth.

I moaned as I pushed her away gently. “You just can’t escape being human. Your stomach’s growling.”

She sighed, dropped her hands to her side and took off walking without me. I caught up with her and grabbed her hand, hoping to smooth things over. We walked back silently, holding hands the rest of the way.

“You go change and I’ll make you some dinner,” I said when we finally reached the house.

I heard the shower starting as I made my way into the kitchen. Images of her in that small, steamy room filled my thoughts. I shook my head, as if that would clear away the seductive pictures in my mind, and forced myself to focus all my attention for the next fifteen minutes on preparing her meal.

When she came back into the kitchen, she was wearing a short, silky, foam green bathrobe tied at the waist with a silk sash. It was obvious there was nothing underneath, because it clung to the moisture on her body in the most inconvenient places. *Damn you, Alice*, I thought as I reluctantly pulled my eyes back up to her face.

“What’s for dinner?” she asked with an innocent smile.

“Fish,” I announced. I had prepared Lemon Broiled Fish and steamed vegetables for her, with a small salad on the side. She mostly ate in silence, but occasionally she stopped in between bites to gush over my culinary skills.

After we had cleaned up the kitchen, she put her arms around my waist and looked up at me. “I have an idea. Let’s curl up on that huge couch in the den and watch movies tonight.”

You naughty girl. There’s no way you’re getting me on that couch. “I have an even better idea,” I said, playfully touching her nose with my finger. “Let’s go watch the sunset from the cliffs.”

“No,” she whined. “I’m too tired to walk anymore today. Let’s stay here.”

“Don’t worry, I’ll carry you most of the way,” I said. When I continued, I looked deep into her eyes, knowing the effect it would have on her. “Besides, it’s very beautiful there...and romantic.” I let my voice rise suggestively on that last word. I knew that would change her mind.

“I’ll go change,” she said excitedly. I chuckled as she hurried from the room, smiling. She was, no doubt, devising another plan to seduce me tonight. She should know me better than that. There was no way she was going to change my mind about the sex thing.

When I went into the bedroom to hunt for a t-shirt, she emerged out of the bathroom in light blue Capri pants and matching tube top. I smiled and complimented her on her outfit as we walked hand in hand out the door.

It was about an hour away from sunset when we started walking toward the cliffs located at the western end of the island. It wasn’t long before she complained of being tired and asked me to carry her. She hoisted herself up onto my back, and we ran swiftly to the cliffs looming in the distance. When we arrived there a few minutes later, she slid off my back and looked up, eyes

wide with wonder, at the cliff face towering over her in the darkening sky.

“They’re beautiful,” she whispered. “But how are we going to get up there? They must be hundreds of feet high.”

I laughed. “You’re being absurd again. I’ve climbed these cliffs so many times that I could do it with my eyes shut. Hop on,” I said, as I turned my back to her. She jumped back up and wrapped her arms around my body tighter than usual. “It’s a good thing I don’t have to breathe. I’d be starting to turn blue by now.”

“Please don’t shut your eyes,” she whispered shakily.

I laughed loudly as I started climbing. In less than a minute, we were at the top of one of the cliffs, standing on a circular flat ledge about twenty feet across. It was the perfect vantage point to see a sunset. Nothing obstructed our view as far as the eye could see.

“Bella....you can let go now.”

She hesitated for a moment before finally loosening her death grip on my chest. “That was the scariest, most horrifying, most amazing thing ever,” she gasped, as she slid off my back. She started to walk carefully toward the cliff edge, but I grabbed her arm and pulled her gently back to me. I couldn’t stand the thought of her that close to the edge. It brought back too many painful memories from last year. “Let’s sit down back here,” I said.

We ended up sitting side by side with hands clasped, our backs resting against an upraised rock ledge. We gazed out over the vista before us and watched the sun inching slowly down to the horizon. Blazing orange light reflected off the water and turned the wispy clouds a dark red. I glanced at her as the light ocean breeze ruffled her hair. She was staring off into the distance with a small smile on her lips. I closed my eyes and breathed deeply as the breeze wafted her scent over me.

We sat quietly until the sun had almost dipped below the horizon. When nature decided to flaunt Her overwhelming beauty in front of two insignificant beings such as ourselves, all we could do was watch Her display in awed silence. To talk would have seemed blasphemous. Finally, when the sun had disappeared from our view, and we were enveloped in darkness, she spoke.

“I want to talk about the bruises.”

“Bella...please...don’t.”

“The bruises aren’t that big of a deal,” she said. I started to speak, but she interrupted and continued more forcefully, the words coming in a rush. “I get bruises all the time, always have. My skin’s just like that. They’re temporary, Edward. Some of them are already fading. And if I don’t mind, you shouldn’t either. I’m the one who should decide whether I was in pain or not, and I wasn’t. I don’t understand why you’re doing this. This is our honeymoon. We’ll never have another honeymoon like this one.” She was practically pleading with me by the time she finished speaking.

I squeezed her hand lightly and tried to think of a way to explain this to her so she’d understand. I finally took her hand in both of mine and leaned close into her. I spoke softly into the darkness, without looking into her eyes. “Please let me try to explain it to you, and please don’t interrupt me. Just listen and try to see my point of view,” I said quietly. She didn’t speak, so I continued.

“I’ve always been what you would call “old-fashioned” about things. I didn’t want to be intimate with you until we were married, even though that sort of thing seems to be in vogue nowadays.

It's just not the way I think a relationship should progress. And it all comes from the time period I was raised in.

"You see, in the early 1900's, when I was born and grew into adolescence, women were treated with respect and deference. I grew up seeing that deference all around me and it became ingrained in my psyche. So when I was changed, those morals and ideals came with me into this new life, even stronger than before. One of those morals I brought with me is that a man should never, ever hurt his wife, and it has nothing to do with me being a vampire or a human. There's just no justification, ever, in my mind for a man to leave marks on his wife." I stopped and waited for her reaction, but she didn't say anything. "Can you understand?"

"I do, in a way," she said finally. "But what you're talking about is men hurting women intentionally, like beating them, or something horrible like that. You didn't hurt me that way. You were loving me, not intentionally trying to inflict pain on me. It isn't the same thing."

"It is to me, and it's even worse because I hurt you while taking pleasure for myself," I said, barely disguising my disgust.

She sighed loudly and leaned her head against my shoulder. "You're not going to change your mind, are you?"

"No."

We sat in the darkness together, each thinking our own private thoughts. My hand was laying on her knee, when she suddenly turned it over and started lightly tracing lines on my palm and fingers, just like she had in the meadow that day long ago. It felt delicious then, and it felt even more delicious now, especially since I now knew what else she could do with those beautiful fingers.

It felt so nice that I responded in kind. I brushed my fingers over her hand, lightly tracing lines on her palm and fingers. She ran her index finger delicately up each of my fingers and then continued up my forearm. She ran that finger up and down my arm continuously, and each time my body reacted to her touch. I, in turn, ran my fingers lightly up her arm and back down, along each of her fingers. I felt the shiver that ran down her body at my touch. Our fingers continued to dance this sensuous dance in the darkness, as if they had a mind of their own. I enjoyed it as long as I could, before I finally stilled her hand and gripped it in mine. I knew she heard my tortured breaths in the quiet night, as I heard hers.

"Edward..." she whispered. She hesitated for a moment, and then I was startled to feel the intense heat of her face burning on my shoulder. I knew without looking that she was blushing deeply.

"What?" I asked softly, my curiosity piqued. Bella never blushed this badly unless she was extremely embarrassed.

"Nothing," she said, but my Bella Radar was suddenly going off the charts.

I chuckled. "Haven't we been through this before? Just tell me whatever it is now and save us both the trouble of me pestering it out of you." I waited patiently for her to continue. We had all night, after all.

"Well..." she started, and then stopped.

I laughed quietly. "Go on..."

I heard her take a deep breath. I braced myself for whatever was coming. With her, I could never

be sure what it would be.

“Well...we could...well...you know...um...”

I shifted my body so I could face her in the darkness, and took her face gently between my hands. “Just tell me, love.” She had no choice now but to tell me. I wasn’t letting her turn away until she did. I wished I could just read her mind!

“If you won’t change your mind about...well, you know...then we could...” she stopped again.

I growled softly in frustration. “Bella! Tell me.”

“There are ways we can please each other without sex,” she said softly. “And you wouldn’t hurt me.”

I sat very still, actually considering her suggestion. I had to smile at her logic. To her it must have seemed the perfect solution to our dilemma.

“What are you thinking?” she asked.

“I don’t think that would be a good idea. After last night, I wouldn’t be satisfied with just that, and I don’t think you would be either. I’d want more, you’d want more, and then we’d just end up back at square one,” I said, sighing.

“But I liked square one,” she said in a small voice.

So did I. I kissed her forehead and brushed my hand down her hair. “We need to get back.”

She sighed softly as I helped her up from the ground. I scaled down the cliff quickly with her clutching my body even more tightly than before; it must have been because of the darkness. I ran swiftly back across the sand and lightly deposited her in front of the French doors. She turned from me and went quietly into the bathroom. I followed and tapped on the door to ask if she wanted something to eat before bed. She murmured her denial through the closed door.

I changed into boxers (I no longer thought it wise to sleep nude) and stretched out on the bed with a book. I watched as she exited the bathroom, pulled out a dresser drawer, and dug around in the clothes, searching for a nightgown, I supposed. I guess she’d reconsidered the nudity thing, also. I turned my attention back to my book, and heard her pad back to the bathroom and shut the door.

She stayed in there quite awhile. I was just about to ask if she was all right when she finally emerged. I managed to keep my mouth closed, but my eyes gave me away. They widened in shock at the sight standing before me. That was no nightgown she had on. It was beige silk and black lace seduction clinging suggestively to the most glorious body I’d ever seen. *Alice is to blame for this. I’m going to strangle that lovely neck of hers when I get back.*

“You like it?” she asked shyly, as she spun around in a circle. She turned fast enough to show a hint of black lace peeking out underneath the extra-short hemline.

I quickly pulled myself together and smiled calmly back at her. “You look lovely. That color becomes you,” I murmured. Then I pulled my eyes away and looked back down at my book. I had to force myself to concentrate and I still ended up reading the same line over and over again. I continued with my pretend reading while she crawled onto the bed and snuggled up against me.

She tugged gently on the book. I let her pull it from my grasp and drop it to the floor. She turned on her side, with her back to me, so I turned onto my side also. She cuddled even closer to me

then, spooning her body inside mine and wiggling her bottom against me to get comfortable. Damn.

“Goodnight. I love you,” she murmured.

“Goodnight,” I murmured into her hair. “I love you too. Always.”

I lay perfectly still, afraid to move. I prayed that she would fall asleep before she could wiggle that beautiful round bottom up against me again. Thankfully, it wasn't long before her breathing became regular and deep.

Only then, when I was absolutely sure she was asleep, did I dare press my body firmly up against her and moan softly at the contact. I held her that way all through the night. I ran my hand lightly over her skin and the soft silk clinging to it. And all the while, my body ached with a need unlike any I'd ever known before.

Bad Vampire Jokes & Macaws

It was mid morning before she awoke. The bright sun was streaming through the windows and reflecting off her hair. She rolled over, lifted her eyes to mine, and gave me a sleepy smile.

“Good morning, sleepy head,” I murmured, smiling back at her.

“Mmmm. Morning,” she purred as she sat up and stretched.

As she crawled off the bed and headed to the bathroom, I quickly searched through my various breakfast choices, trying to decide what to fix for her. “I think I’ll make you a Breakfast Burrito this morning. How’s that sound?”

“Sounds good, thanks!” she said as she shut the bathroom door.

It didn’t take long to prepare burritos, so by the time she shuffled into the kitchen, there were two of them waiting for her on her plate, along with a tall glass of orange juice.

“These are huge. I could barely eat one, let alone two,” she protested as she sat down at the table. I was relieved to see the return of the foam green bathrobe. I didn’t think I could handle beige and black lace seduction this morning.

“I decided on the spur of the moment that two would be better. You’re going to need your energy today,” I said, grinning mysteriously.

“Why? What are we doing?” she asked suspiciously.

“I thought we could walk to the south end of the island and visit the macaws that live in the jungle canopy there.”

“How far of a walk?” she asked, one eyebrow raised.

“Oh, it’s a couple of miles one way. About five total,” I said hesitantly. “Not any longer than our hike to the meadow.”

“All right.” She sighed. “That sounds like fun.” There was a definite lack of excitement in her voice.

After she finished eating I suggested she go change while I cleaned up. I swiftly tidied the kitchen, packed the backpack full of items we would need today and then hurried into the bedroom to find something to wear. I dug out a pair of baggy, dark blue khaki shorts out of a drawer, along with a light blue sleeveless t-shirt. Then I slipped on a pair of canvas shoes. I turned as Bella came out of the bathroom. We looked at each other for a moment, and then she covered her mouth and giggled.

“We match,” she said.

No we don’t, I thought. Her shorts were dark blue all right, but they were a lot shorter than mine, and tighter. And my t-shirt wasn’t cut off just above my navel and almost see-through. I also didn’t forget to put on a bra! I thought about asking her to change, but decided that might hurt her feelings, so I let it go. I sighed inwardly. This could quite possibly turn out to be a more difficult day than I had planned.

She tossed me the sunscreen, turned and raised her ponytail up onto her head. I swiftly covered the back of her neck in the white cream, careful not to let my hands linger any longer than necessary. After I finished, I planted a soft kiss just behind her ear. She sighed as she turned around.

“Can I have a good morning kiss before we go?” she asked shyly.

I leaned into her and lightly brushed her lips with mine. She made a small, delightful sound and immediately pressed up against me. I gently pulled her away, and gave her one last quick kiss before things could get out of hand. “We need to get started.” I tried to ignore the brief flash of disappointment I saw in her eyes.

I grabbed the backpack, slung it over one shoulder, and offered her my hand. She slipped her feet into a pair of canvas shoes as we went through the door.

“How many of those shorts do you own?” she asked, smirking, as we started walking through the sand.

“Thanks to Alice, probably a couple hundred in every color imaginable.” I chuckled. “Except white, of course.”

She glanced up at me curiously. “Why not white?”

“Alice tells me that I should never wear white against my pale skin.” I smiled and glanced down at her as I added the punch line. “It makes me look dead.”

We stared at each for a couple of seconds, and then a small smile appeared at the corners of her mouth. Finally, she couldn’t contain the laughter any longer. She started laughing uncontrollably and I laughed with her, happy that I’d succeeded in cheering her up a little.

“Is that a vampire joke?” she asked, still trying to contain her giggles.

“No, that’s an Alice fashion joke,” I answered, grinning. “But I have a ton of vampire jokes. Want to hear them?”

“Sure, why not.”

I waited a few beats and then asked: “What’s a vampire’s worst fear?”

She pretended to think about it, and then gave up.

“Tooth decay,” I answered with a laugh.

“Oh, that’s so corny,” she said, snickering. “But true.”

We walked hand in hand for awhile, talking about inconsequential things. Occasionally I’d point out something interesting in the flora and explain it to her, or we’d see a quick flash of color, some animal fleeing in the undergrowth. “What’s a vampire’s favorite fruit?” I asked as we shuffled quietly through the low bushes.

“I don’t know,” she said, her mouth turned up slightly in the corners.

“Neck-tarine,” I answered, grinning crookedly down at her.

She groaned, but smiled. “Edward, those are horrible.”

Yeah, they are pretty bad, but she's laughing and that's all that counts. “There’s a small clearing up ahead. We’ll rest there a bit, if you’d like,” I suggested.

“How far are we from the macaws?” she asked as she dug out a bottle of water and took several huge gulps.

“We’re nearly there. We’ve set a pretty good pace. It must be the stimulating conversation,” I said with a crooked grin. “Speaking of which: These three vampires went into a bar and sat down...”

“Oh my god, not a vampire bar joke!” she sputtered with a laugh.

I ignored her protests and continued. “Three vampires went into a bar and sat down. The barmaid came over to take their orders. ‘And what would you, er, gentlemen like tonight?’ The first vampire said, ‘I’ll have a mug of blood.’ The second vampire said, ‘I’ll have a mug of blood.’ The third vampire shook his head at his companions and said, ‘I will have a glass of plasma.’ The barmaid wrote down each order, went to the bar and called to the bartender, ‘Two bloods and a blood light.’ That’s Emmett’s favorite,” I said, smiling as she broke out into giggles again.

When she’d finished her water, we started off again. The undergrowth was getting a little denser and I had to walk in front of her to clear a path. “What did the vampire say to the werewolf?” I asked as I pushed the brush out of the way for her.

She frowned. “I don’t know.”

“Dude, you’re going to the dogs!” I snickered. *Oops.* She didn’t like that one, and that was my favorite one. “Jacob joke. I couldn’t resist,” I said with a small smile. “Forgive me?”

The frown left her face. “I forgive you, but that was bad,” she said with a tiny smile.

“What’s a vampire’s favorite mixed drink?” I asked quickly.

“Edward!” she protested, laughing as she put her hands over her ears. “Stop!”

“A Bloody Mary!”

We finally reached the area where the parrots roosted. I gave her bird seed and instructions on what to do and what not to do and gently nudged her into the clearing. I watched from a distance as the colorful birds swooped down to the seed. Her face lit up each and every time. She covered her ears and laughed when their excited screeches became too loud. Her face was filled with wonder at the sheer size of them and their spectacular beauty. I loved seeing her like this, carefree and laughing. When the bird seed was gone, she straightened up and walked back to me in the bushes.

“That was so beautiful,” she said quietly. “Thank you.”

“I’m just glad you enjoyed them,” I said, brushing a lock of hair back from her eyes.

We started walking back, hand in hand. It was late afternoon now, and the heat was at its most oppressive. “Do you want to stop and eat something?”

“Sure. Uh...where are the bathrooms, by the way?” she asked.

I gestured widely with my hand, grinning. “Pick any tree of your choice while I get your snack out of the backpack.”

When she returned, she leaned against a tree and started fanning herself and complaining of the heat. She reached her arms out to me and I knew what she wanted. I thought this was a terrible idea, but I couldn't just stand by and watch her be uncomfortable. I walked slowly over to her and enveloped her in my arms. She sighed up against my chest and pressed her body close. She feels so good. Too good. My body automatically responded to the soft, silky feel of her, the dizzying scent of her and I had to fight an almost overwhelming urge to run my fingers up under her t-shirt and cup her breasts in my hands. I closed my eyes and imagined the feel of her nipples hardening under my touch. I moaned softly at my weakness and loosed her arms from around my neck. I gently pushed her away, and could see the hurt in her eyes as I stepped back.

"You want me. I can tell," she said in a low voice, as her eyes roved slowly over my body.

"I can't help that," I said, sighing and looking at the ground. I couldn't stand seeing the pain in her eyes, knowing it was my fault. "I'm sorry, Bella."

"I just want you to hold me. It's so hot," she pleaded.

"I don't think that's a good idea," I said quietly, shaking my head and raising my gaze to hers.

Her eyes were filled with anger. "You don't think that's a good idea," she repeated, her voice flat and devoid of emotion. She stared at me for a few more moments before she spoke. "You know what really frustrates me about you?" I sensed her anger simmering beneath the surface.

"I'm sure there are a lot of things," I said quietly, uneasy at the direction in which our conversation was moving.

She ignored my comment and continued. "You think about things way too damn much," she said, her voice rising slightly.

Of course she was right. "I can't help that. I've always been that way, and I've gotten worse since I met you," I admitted. I didn't want to fight with her, not over this.

She ran her fingers through her hair in frustration. "Have you ever done *anything* without analyzing it to death first?"

"I saved you from the van," I said, boldly meeting her eyes. How could she have forgotten that? If I hadn't saved her, without thinking of the consequences first, we wouldn't even be here right now.

Her eyes softened and some of her anger receded. "I'm not talking about life and death. You know I'll never forget what you did for me that day. I'm talking about everyday things, about life in general. Don't you ever want to just...just let go of that control of yours and just...feel? Really feel something with all your being, without thinking about it first?"

There was a pleading sadness in her voice that touched something deep inside of me. She spoke of a freedom I'd never known. I'd never been able to just feel anything. There had always been something in the way: fear, guilt, responsibility. She had no idea how much I longed for the kind of freedom she talked about so casually, but it was an unrealistic yearning.

"I wish I could do that, but it's not possible for me. I can't lose control, especially with you. You know that." The anguish in my voice matched the sadness in her eyes.

"You might not hurt me the next time," she pleaded.

Aah, it's back to this again. "We talked about this last night. I thought you understood," I said impatiently.

"If I remember correctly, I disagreed with you," she retorted. "Nothing was settled!"

"I'm not doing this to hurt you. You know that, don't you?" I asked. "I'm doing it because I hurt you. Don't you see the difference?"

But it was as if I'd never even spoken. "You know what to expect now. It's like everything else. You'll be able to handle it better the next time."

"You don't know that for sure," I said exasperated at her unrelenting persistence.

"I'm willing to take the chance," she said.

"Well I'm not," I said stubbornly.

Then she surprised me by breaking out in laughter, but it wasn't a happy sound at all. "See?!" she said with an ironic laugh. "THIS is what I'm talking about! Here we are on our honeymoon, standing on the most beautiful tropical island I've ever seen, and we're TALKING about having sex instead of just HAVING sex!"

I was stunned at her outburst and unsure what to say in response. I did the smart thing, for once, and said nothing.

"This is SO you, Edward." She growled in frustration and turned to walk away from me.

"Bella," I gripped her arm to stop her from leaving. "I'm sorry. I don't want to fight. Please," I begged.

"Are you going to hold me?" I could see the anger of her challenge burning in her eyes. I'd never seen her like this, and it made me very uneasy.

When I made no move to approach her, she whirled around and stalked back to where the backpack lay on the ground. She dug several bottles of water out of it. I watched in shock as she opened and poured them over herself, drenching her hair, face and chest with the cool water. I was dismayed to see that, with the addition of water, her t-shirt was now completely see-through. I always wondered why an intelligent man would spend hard-earned money to see a wet t-shirt contest. Now I knew. She stalked up to me until we stood only a foot apart.

"I'm feeling much better now," she said smugly.

The scent of her hair in the humid air spread over me. *She has to know what this does to me. Why is she tormenting me this way?* I suddenly couldn't control my eyes. They were like two powerful magnets being drawn uncontrollably downward against my will. I drank in the sight of her chest and the tantalizing way the wet cloth clung to her body. I did the only thing I could: I closed my eyes and backed away from her.

She turned from me and stalked off. I grabbed the backpack and hurried to catch up with her. I looked at her frequently as we walked, but she stared straight off into the distance, refusing to talk or even look at me. I tried once to apologize, but my words fell on deaf ears. During the uncomfortable walk back, I thought about that moment when I'd resolved to never make love to her again until she was changed, and then I wondered...

What in the hell had I been thinking??

Strawberry Daiquiri & Rum

As soon as we walked through the French doors, she kicked off her shoes and immediately started rummaging around in the dresser drawers and gathering up a handful of clothes and supplies.

"I'm taking a shower," she said abruptly, stomping by me into the bathroom and slamming the door behind her. I was hoping the long walk would have given her time to calm down, but if anything, she seemed worse.

I leaned my head against the bathroom door as I heard her turning on the water. "Bella...?" She didn't answer. "I'm going to fix you a cool drink and something to eat. All right?" No response. Then I heard the harsh metallic sound of the shower curtain rings being yanked violently across the rod.

I made my way slowly to the kitchen wondering how I was going to fix this. As I gathered the ingredients to make her a cold cut sandwich, I wracked my brain for a solution. Apologies were definitely out. I'd tried to apologize the whole walk back, to no avail. I'd already tried reasoning calmly with her last night, and that sure hadn't worked. I briefly considered throwing a temper tantrum, just letting all this tension and frustration rush out of me in one violent rant, but I dismissed the idea as juvenile. That would only result in a screaming match, which would get us nowhere.

Then I considered her solution. Deep down, I knew how to resolve this whole tense mess. If I just gave into her, everything would be fine. If nothing else, at least it would put an end to this constant barrage of seductions she'd been throwing at me. I never knew my sweet Bella could be so devious. Headstrong, yes, but this? If I wasn't so busy struggling with all my strength to resist her, I might have found the whole thing immensely amusing.

But the bruises. I couldn't forget the bruises, even though they were beginning to fade. I shuddered at the thought of my hands putting a whole new round of fresh bruises on her soft, fragile body, just for the sake of sex.

With the sandwich finished, I gathered the ingredients to make her drink. Strawberries were her favorite fruit, so maybe an offering of a nice, cool, refreshing strawberry daiquiri would smooth things over just a little. I read the instructions carefully, and swiftly put the drink together—minus the rum of course—into a triangular chilled glass. The last thing Bella needed right now was alcohol.

I carried her sandwich and drink into the bedroom just as she was pulling a short emerald green cotton dress down over her hips. She grabbed her towel off of the bed and started rubbing her hair with it, and carefully avoiding my eyes in the process.

"I made you a cold sandwich," I said hesitantly. "I thought it'd be a nice change after the heat." I sat the sandwich down on the bedside table and offered her the daiquiri. "I also made you a strawberry daiquiri."

She looked at me then and sighed, reaching for the drink. "Thanks," she said half-heartedly. She took a rather large gulp and then frowned. "There's no alcohol in it," she said, dropping the towel aimlessly to the floor.

An uneasy feeling crept through me as I looked into her eyes. "Alcohol isn't good for you," I said hesitantly. I winced at her expression, wishing I could put the words back in my stupid mouth.

She straightened up and glared back at me. The anger in her eyes was shocking. *What the hell did I say wrong?*

“And you’re the one who always gets to decide what’s good for me, right?” she asked, glaring, her voice low and ominous.

For once, I was at a loss for words. I had a feeling that anything I said now, no matter how contrite, was only going to make matters worse, so I kept my mouth shut.

“You’re my husband, not my father!” she shouted. “I don’t need you to tell me what’s good for me and what’s not! I lived perfectly fine without you for seventeen years!” She must have realized she was shouting, because when she continued, her voice was quieter, but still filled with anger. “Sometimes, you’re just too over-protective,” she said between clenched teeth.

“You’re not telling me anything I don’t already know about myself. It’s just...with you...I can’t help it.” I sighed loudly. “I just want to keep you safe until you’re changed.”

She looked me straight in the eye and thrust the glass toward me, spilling half of it on her arm and on the floor in the process. “Make me a real daiquiri,” she said quietly, the determination shining in her eyes.

I considered refusing, but finally decided it was a small concession to make on my part, considering the enormous thing I was withholding from her. After all, what harm could there be in one little alcoholic drink? I took the glass and went back into the kitchen. I gathered all the ingredients together again, and then opened cabinet doors searching for some rum. I hoped the cleaning crew thought of alcohol when they stocked the kitchen, or I was in deep trouble. I exhaled in relief when I found a large supply of bottles in the pantry. I found the rum, opened it and sat it on the counter beside the ingredients. I was just beginning to make her drink when I heard her footsteps coming into the kitchen.

Before I knew what was happening, she walked swiftly up beside me and grabbed the rum bottle and hid it behind her back as she backed away toward the kitchen door. “On second thought, forget about the daiquiri,” she said. As I stared at her in astonishment, she raised her chin defiantly and proclaimed, “I’m getting drunk tonight.”

My mouth fell open even though I tried to stop it. I wouldn’t have been any more shocked if she’d suddenly grown another head right beside the beautiful one glaring angrily back at me.

Bella, give me the bottle.”

She glared back at me and silently shook her head from side to side.

“Just let me make you another daiquiri. Give me the bottle, love.” I spoke softly. “You don’t want to do this.”

Her eyes widened and then narrowed ominously. “Don’t tell me what I want to do,” she said slowly.

I stood helpless, unable to decide what action to take. It was obvious she wasn’t going to give me back the bottle, and I really didn’t want to force her. I might inadvertently hurt her trying to wrest the damned thing from her grasp.

“Bella...” I started, without having any idea what I was going to say next, but she interrupted me before I could finish.

"You're the one who's always wanted me to have all these human experiences." She held up one hand as she continued, counting off with her fingers. "I went to the prom. I got engaged. I got married, with the wedding dress, bridesmaids, and the whole nine yards. I had some excellent sex...*once*. And now I'm going to get drunk," she proclaimed stubbornly.

"You're just doing this because you're angry with me."

"Getting drunk is practically a teenage rite of passage, Edward. You wouldn't want me to miss out on that? Besides," she said with a small sly grin. "Wouldn't you rather me do it when you're here to watch out after me? I might decide to do it one day when you're not around. Then, I might think I can drive a car, or I might accidentally drink too much and get alcohol poisoning."

I gazed into those mesmerizing brown eyes and it finally dawned on me. It was like the sun suddenly bursting through a thick cloud bank on a rainy day, it was so obvious. How could I have been so stupid? This wasn't about the daiquiri, and it wasn't about the sex, either. It was much, much deeper than that. This was about control: who was going to have it and how much. I thought back through all the events in our time together, and I realized that I had controlled or tried to control everything in our relationship from the very beginning. In every instance, I had only been doing what I'd thought was best, but still, I'd taken every decision away from her without even considering her feelings. I could only imagine how frustrating that must have been for her and, obviously, how frustrating it still was. She was right. I wasn't her father, and she was certainly old enough to make her own decisions.

"All right," I conceded quietly. "But I have one condition."

"What?" she asked suspiciously.

I reached up into the cabinet and pulled out a shot glass. I stretched out my open hand to her. "I get to keep the bottle."

She eyed me for a moment, probably wondering whether it was just a ruse to get the rum away from her. She must have seen the honesty in my eyes, because she gave it to me. She smiled smugly at me, turned and walked down the hall toward the bedroom. As I followed behind her, I quickly checked the alcohol content on the bottle. I hurriedly calculated the exact amount of alcohol she could consume based on her body weight and other miscellaneous factors. By the time we both reached the bedroom, I was inwardly smiling. She may have won the battle, but I was going to win the war.

When she started to sit down on the bed, I suggested the beach instead. She smiled up at me and grabbed a blanket from the floor. We walked out together and found a nice spot near a palm. Together, we spread the blanket out on the sand. She sat down, and crossed her legs, Indian style. I sat down in front of her, mirroring her pose exactly.

"You're sure about this?"

She nodded, so I poured her an ounce-and-a-half shot and handed it to her.

"That's all?" she asked incredulously. She reached for the bottle and I pulled it back behind me.

"No, love. We agreed. I keep the bottle," I said with a small smile.

She took the small glass and wrinkled her nose in distaste as she sniffed the contents. I couldn't have agreed more. The stuff smelled horrible; I could only imagine how it would taste. She tilted her head back and gulped it down all at once. Her whole body shuddered as it went down and she let out a harsh gasp at the end.

"That good, huh?" I smiled as she glared at me and presented the empty glass. "No. No more yet. Let's let it get into your system a little."

According to my calculations, she would be pleasantly drunk after four shots of an ounce-and-a-half each, drank every fifteen minutes. Any more than that and she would be sick and miserable, and I didn't want that to happen. She'd had a lot of physical activity today, so she was tired, and she had eaten very lightly. The rum was going to hit her pretty hard, pretty fast. I expected her to collapse long before the hour was up.

I watched curiously as the alcohol started affecting her body. She was more relaxed now, the tension in her muscles eased. The anger was gone. Her heart was beating a little faster than normal. Her eyes were closed and she had a small, satisfied smile on her lips. Her hands were lying loosely in her lap.

"What's it like?" I asked curiously.

"My head is spinning, just a little," she murmured and smiled, with her eyes still shut. "My whole body feels so light, like it wants to float away, and I'm all warm and tingly inside. She sighed deeply and continued. "You really should try it Edward. It's so nice."

"Alcohol doesn't affect me the same way, remember? I could drink it, if I could tolerate the taste of it, but it would just sit in my stomach until I expelled it. Unfortunately, my body only absorbs blood."

"Hmmpf. That's too bad," she said.

I thought about her description of the alcohol in her system and had to smile. I suddenly realized that I'd been reeling drunk numerous times since I'd met her. "You know the way you're feeling right now? I feel that way every time I breathe your scent deep into my lungs."

She opened her eyes wide in astonishment. "Really? You really get dizzy and all...floaty...just from the way I smell?"

I nodded and laughed quietly.

"Edward..." she whispered as she reached over lightly and brushed my cheek with her fingers. "You never told me that before. I never knew."

"And its worse when your hair is wet or the air is humid, like it is here. That's why I crave your scent all the time. It's like my own personal bottle of rum."

"Awww. That's so sweet." She held out her empty glass; I poured another ounce and a half into it. She gulped it down all at once and didn't even shudder this time.

"Better the second time around?" She just smiled crookedly back at me and closed her eyes. She hummed for awhile and moved her head slowly around in circles. I had no idea why and didn't want to disturb her to ask.

Edward!" she exclaimed as her eyes suddenly flew open. "I know how we could get you drunk!"

"How?"

She grinned. "We'll make you a mountain lion cocktail," she said, her voice slurring over the consonants. "We'll get some blood....and then add a little...what's that stuff?" she asked, pointing

at the bottle in my hand.

“Rum?” I supplied.

“Yeah, rum. We’ll add some rum and stir it in real good—” she actually stirred the imaginary drink with her finger. “—then we’ll put it in one of those thingies...,” she said with confused look.

“Thingies?” I asked, chuckling.

“You know...thingies,” she said, giggling. “One of those triangally thingies!”

I couldn’t help but laugh out loud at her pitiful attempt to pluck the simple word from her addled brain. “Glass?” I offered.

“Yes!” she said as she jabbed her finger in the air at me. “Glass! One of those triangally glasses! And then we’ll put one of those teeny tiny pink umbrellas in it.” She giggled in a high, little-girly voice. “That would do it!”

“That is the most disgusting thing I’ve ever heard,” I said, grimacing at the thought.

She pouted and frowned at me. “You’re no fun. I bet you’ve never even tried it.”

“Drinking cold blood is like—” I searched my mind for an appropriate comparison that she would understand. “—you drinking spoiled milk.”

“Ewww!” She wrinkled up her nose and sighed loudly. Then her lids dropped shut, and she sat still for little while, swaying to music only she could hear. Then, apparently, she had an epiphany. “We could heat it in the microwave!” she exclaimed, giggling.

I was beginning to realize that there was no reasoning with a giggly first-time drinker.

“It has to have a name. What do we call it?” she asked, rolling her eyes up as if she could find the answer on her forehead.

“How about a Bloody Mountain Lion?” I suggested, grinning.

She fell over onto her side, giggling uncontrollably at my ridiculously stupid mixed-drink joke. I laughed and gently grabbed her arms and helped her sit back up.

“No, wait Edward! What was that joke about the vampire and the drink?” she asked, gripping my arm.

“The vampire’s favorite drink is a Bloody Mary?” I asked, surprised she could remember that in the state she was in.

“Yeah. That one. Change it next time to a Bloody Mountain Lion!”

She picked the empty glass up off of the blanket where she had dropped it, and offered it to me to refill. I poured another ounce and a half into the glass. As she gulped it down, I turned the bottle upside down and poured the rest into the sand.

Instead of being upset, she whooped loudly. “Woo-hoo! The crabs are going to pa..ar..ty tonight!” she yelled and then giggled wildly.

How much longer can she last? Then she became quiet for a few minutes, before she finally started humming again. It was certainly no tune that I recognized, and I doubt that she did, either.

"I want to dance," she said, suddenly serious.

I laughed out loud at her suggestion. "You can't dance on level ground when you're sober."

"That's why I have you," she said as she poked her finger in my chest. "You always hold me up."

I sighed and stood, pulling her up by her hands from the blanket. She staggered into my arms and I had to grab her tightly around the waist to keep her from falling. I thought it best not to venture out into the uneven sand, so we stood on the blanket swaying to nonexistent music. She was standing on my feet and felt like a rag doll in my arms, soft and pliable in all the right places. She laid her head on my chest and started humming a strangely familiar tune.

"What are you humming?" I asked.

"The song we danced to at our wedding. Remember?"

"Why don't you let me hum it? At least we'll be able to recognize it," I said with a soft laugh.

" 'kay," she murmured as she continued swaying, her arms clutched tightly around my neck.

We "danced" this way for awhile as I hummed the song we first danced to at our reception. Her body felt so good up against mine. It didn't take long for me to realize that this was a very good and a very bad idea.

I closed my eyes and concentrated on her and nothing else: the feel of her breasts pressed up against me, the warmth of her breath through my shirt, the rapid beating of her heart, the brush of her hips against mine. My hands moved of their own accord slowly down her body. I moaned softly when I realized she wasn't wearing a bra or panties.

She looked up at me, gripped my hair in her hands and pulled my mouth down to hers. And I kissed her. I moaned and kissed her without restraint. I didn't care that I could taste the rum on her breath. I slowly pulled on the fabric of her dress, inch by inch, bunching it up into my fist so that I could finally reach underneath. And all the while, our mouths never separated. I told myself that I was just sampling the bouquet, as I snaked my hand underneath her dress. *I'm not going to drink the wine*, I thought as I slid my hand over her bottom. I gasped and pressed hard against her.

I can do this, I thought, as her tongue darted into my mouth. *I'm just enjoying the bouquet*, I repeated to myself as I slid the thin straps of her dress off her shoulders. Then I slid my hands further down, cupping her breasts and squeezing gently. She moaned and ran her hand slowly down my body and I didn't stop her. I closed my eyes and let her touch me, groaning at the firm press of her hand. I wasn't going to drink the wine. I was just enjoying the bouquet.

"Edward." She staggered in my arms and I gripped her firmly to keep her from falling. Her hair fell across her face as she collapsed back against me.

It was only a moment of distraction, but it was long enough to make me realize what I'd been doing. She was drunk and I was pawing her without even a moment's consideration. I was thoroughly disgusted with myself.

"Bella," I said hoarsely. "You need to sit down."

She didn't object as I carefully lowered her to the blanket. I sat down beside her and leaned back against the palm. She scooted back against me, between my legs, and laid her back against my chest. I buried my face in the back of her hair and prayed she'd pass out soon. I spent the next

several moments listening to her rapid heartbeat and idling twining her hair through my fingers. I stopped and breathed the scent of her into my lungs, and closed my eyes as my head reeled from it.

“Why don’t you want me anymore?” she asked suddenly in a small, defeated voice. Her sadness felt like a thousand knives stabbing me in the heart.

“I *do* want you. I’ll *always* want you.” *I want you right now.* Even in her drunken state, she should have been able to tell that.

“Then why are you doing this to us?” she murmured. “You didn’t hurt me that badly.”

I didn’t answer. We’d been over this before, and if I couldn’t reason with her then, I surely wasn’t going to be able to reason with her now, not in this state. So we sat together and stared, unseeing, into the night.

“Edward,” she suddenly slurred angrily. “You need to just loosen up. You’re way too uptight.” Her voice trailed off into silence.

“When you’re changed, when your body is new and strong like mine, you’re going to see just how loose I can be. But until that day comes, you’re just going to have to be patient, love.”

I closed my eyes and imagined that day. I saw her, in my mind, standing nude in front of me, her hair lustrous and shining, falling over her shoulders in thick waves, her eyes burning red with the blood lust. I imagined the feel of her skin, hard like mine and warm, the light reflecting off it in a rainbow of colors. The strength of her arms as she embraced me. The intensity of our lovemaking, unlike anything either of us had ever experienced. My body ached for that day, despite my pleas for her to stay human as long as possible.

I sighed as I realized her breathing had become slow and regular. I scooped her up gently in my arms and carried her back into the house. I deposited her on the bed and tried to arrange her limbs in a comfortable position. I gazed with longing at her body as I tugged the dress down modestly over her hips. She’d just have to sleep in it tonight.

I stripped off, put on a pair of boxers, and lay down beside her. I gathered her close in my arms and hoped she didn’t hate me tomorrow when she woke up with a raging headache.

I spent the rest of the night and early morning thinking. Thinking about myself and my faults. Thinking about Bella and her stubborn persistence. Thinking about us, and wondering if I should just do what Bella suggested and let go and feel.

Movies

By mid morning, I was waiting anxiously for her to awake. She had slept so soundly that my tender stroking of her skin never once disturbed her, nor did the kisses I had planted softly in her hair.

Her words from last night, ‘Why don’t you want me anymore?’ had eaten away at me all night long. When she had spoken them on the beach, my heart had broken into a million pieces. How could she not know that my need was as great as hers? I longed to tell her that I ached for her every night, that I wanted nothing more than to let go of all the restraints of my life and just love her the way she wanted to be loved. I had spent most of the night caressing and kissing her, but mostly thinking, trying to come up with a way to get out of this corner I had painted us into. With the coming of sunrise, after all the hours of thinking and analyzing, I still didn’t have a solution.

At the first sign that she was emerging from sleep, I quietly slid from her side, hurriedly dressed in shorts and a t-shirt, and then went into the kitchen to make a hangover remedy for her. The mixer book I had used last night to make the daiquiri had a handy section in the back entitled: “Remedies for the Morning After”. I mixed up a banana shake with milk, honey, and a couple of ground-up aspirins. According to the book, it was guaranteed to work. I hoped so, for both our sakes.

When I returned to the bedroom, she had turned over onto her stomach and buried her head in the pillows. I smiled at the sight of her hair bunched up on top of her head. It was her signature haystack look and I loved it. I sat the shake on the nightstand and gingerly eased myself down beside her on the bed.

“Bella,” I whispered as I gently pushed her hair away from her face. She opened one bleary brown eye and then moaned, burying her head back into the pillows. I leaned down until my lips were next to her ear. “Bella,” I whispered softly. “Rise and shine.”

She once again barely opened one eye against the bright sunshine in the room. She groaned and brought her arms up around her head to block out the light.

“I have something for you to drink that will make you feel better,” I said softly. “It has aspirin in it for your headache.”

She very slowly eased herself up onto one elbow and squinted up at me with a frown. “What is it?” she whispered, her voice hoarse from sleep.

“It’s a banana shake. Bananas will replace the sugar and potassium that the alcohol took out of your body. There’s honey in it, too.”

“Ok,” she said simply.

I helped her sit upright and gave her the shake. She drank it slowly, with her eyes shut tight against the brightness and one hand clutching her head. When it was all gone, she eased off the bed and headed to the bathroom.

“Do you want me to help you? Get your clothes for you or something?” I asked with concern.

“No,” she said weakly. “Just give me a little while to get myself together. I’ll be all right.” She shut the bathroom door softly and very soon I heard water running.

She evidently wanted to be alone, so I left her to it and went outside to enjoy the midday sun. I sat in the hot sand and thought about what we might do with the rest of the day. I didn't hold out much hope of coaxing her out of the house until she felt better, so that left very few choices. I sighed as I realized that the only option was the den with its enormous plasma TV and hundreds of DVDs. My only hope was that the hangover would dampen her enthusiasm long enough for us to watch some movies together without any more seduction attempts.

"Stupid. Stupid. Stupid."

I laughed quietly as I heard her hissing at herself in the bedroom. I was secretly glad this particular rite of passage was behind us, and, as I suspected, she was too. I rose and ventured cautiously back into the bedroom. She had changed into a light blue strapless sundress, and her hair was now combed smooth and lay draped over her shoulders. She was absolutely beautiful even though her brows were puckered together in a frown.

"Feeling better?" I asked hesitantly.

"Not really." She sighed. "And I'm not going anywhere or doing anything, so don't ask," she added grumpily.

"Would you like something to eat?" I asked, trying not to smile at her grumpiness.

"Ugh. No. Maybe later," she answered with a sick-looking grimace.

"Well, I do have an idea for the rest of the afternoon," I said hesitantly.

"As long as it doesn't involve bright sunlight," she countered with the adorable frown still in place.

"How about an afternoon of movies?"

The frown immediately disappeared and her face lit up with excitement. *Uh oh.*

"Really?" she asked.

"Sure. And you can choose the movies," I said, smiling.

She grabbed my hand and practically pulled me into the den with her. I snatched up the remote and then sprawled onto the huge sofa as she studiously looked over the massive assortment of movies. She finally picked out four or five and stacked them by the TV. She shuffled through them repeatedly until she finally settled on one and then stuck it into the DVD player.

She snuggled up close to me with her head lying on my chest as the opening credits scrolled across the screen. We were starting off with *Titanic*. We had both seen it before, but we cuddled up anyway to watch the ill-fated ocean liner sink to the bottom of the sea. I suspected that Bella was more interested in Jack and Rose's love scenes than anything else. She squeezed my hand tightly during the love scene in the car, and then cried when Jack slipped into the icy waters of the North Atlantic forever.

After the movie ended, I asked her if she was ready to eat, but she shook her head and put the next one in: *The Notebook* by Nicholas Sparks. I had started reading her book, but had never finished it. So, I was a little more interested in this one. She snuggled back against me and cooed during

Allie and Noah's love scenes, and then, once again, cried her eyes out when they died together in bed. I sighed inwardly. *I'm beginning to see a pattern here.*

"Did you pick any that weren't sad?" I asked.

"What? You don't like romance?" she asked, wiping her eyes.

"You seem to be doing more crying than anything else. Wouldn't you rather watch something more light-hearted?"

I should have just kept my thoughts to myself, because the next movie she put in was *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*. I had to admit, it was funny and a welcome change from all the crying, but still...

"Princess Sophia?" I commented, smiling down at her.

She just looked up at me with an evil grin.

"Don't even think about naming mine." I laughed as she giggled and wrapped her arms tightly around my neck.

She continued giggling as she smothered my face in kisses. I slowly pulled her down with me until we were lying down on the couch, her body stretched out on top of mine and my hands lightly stroking her back. Then I closed my eyes and just enjoyed it. Her lips felt like flames licking their way across my skin. I moaned when she kissed her way up my neck to my ear. Then, she pulled away from me and gazed into my eyes.

"I can't stand being with you and not touching you," she said as she ran her fingers through my hair. "You told me the same thing the first time we went to the meadow. Do you remember?"

"I remember. And it's still true." Neither one of us could go very long without some contact, even if it was just holding hands.

"Remember the last day we spent at the meadow...in July?" she asked.

"How could I possibly forget?" I smiled as the memory of that day came flooding back.

That was the last time we had visited the meadow together before the wedding. It had been such a perfect summer day. The sun had been unusually hot, the flowers in full bloom and so fragrant, the grass dry, warm and soft. Bella had been excited at finding a patch of wild strawberries. She had eaten them by the handfuls, while I'd kissed the juice from her lips.

Something about that day—maybe it was just the pure perfection of it—had made me realize how lucky I was to be me. I'd never really felt that way until Bella, and even after Bella came into my life, I still found it difficult to accept the possibility of true happiness. But, it all came together for me that day in the meadow. It was in that newfound state of joy that I'd let down the barriers I had so solidly built between us, just a little. We'd spent most of the afternoon lying in the grass exploring each other. Soft, gentle kisses, light caresses, hesitant touches. We'd been careful not to let it go too far, and it was the most sensuous and intimate thing I'd ever experienced up to that point.

"Let's pretend it's July and we're back in the meadow," she said softly as she lightly brushed my lips with hers. Her voice brought me reluctantly back into the present.

“I don’t know if I can do that.” I kissed her back just as lightly.

“Just a little while. Then we’ll stop. I promise I won’t push things. Please?” The longing in her voice touched something deep inside of me. I wanted this as much as she did.

She nibbled gently at my lip with her teeth and lightly kissed me. I moaned when her tongue briefly met mine. I touched my lips to every part of her face, tasting her and breathing in her scent. Our kisses were soft and light with no urgency. Our fingers brushed across each other’s faces and raked through each other’s hair. Her quiet sighs brought the rush of her breath against my skin, and its sweet smell washed over me. The heat of her body burned through her clothes to scorch my skin, and brought with it a passion too long denied.

I wanted her just as much as I had that day in the meadow. I wanted her blood and her body. The need that was suddenly burning through me was shocking in its violence. The ache for her was so intense it was almost painful. I couldn’t have her then, but I could have her now. She was my wife. I was so tired of denying myself the pleasure of her. As her hips moved slowly over mine, I felt my control slipping through my fingers. I was losing it and I didn’t care anymore.

I moaned her name and then pulled her mouth hard to mine, my hands lost in the tangles of her hair. I devoured her mouth and face, her soft cries of pleasure urging me on. My hands were all over her, and they were not hesitant—they were rough and urgent and probing. Images flashed through my mind of the things I wanted to do to her and it was not soft, lingering lovemaking that I wanted. I distantly realized that my control was almost gone, but I pushed the knowledge away and gave my need free reign.

I pulled frantically at her dress, heard the cloth ripping effortlessly in my hands. Her heartbeat was racing against my chest, her blood screaming through her veins in a rush of heat. I heard my own harsh breaths and it was not a sound I recognized. I was losing it. I was almost gone. The whimpers coming from her mouth were driving me closer and closer to the edge.

“Edward! Stop!”

I buried my face in her hair and raked my teeth down the side of her neck.

“Edward! You’re hurting me!” she shouted. The pain in her voice broke through the thick fog that had taken over my mind. Reality came crashing down on me.

I cursed loudly and pushed her off me. As she fell back against the other end of the sofa, I stumbled backwards away from her, upending the coffee table and sending the lamp to the floor in a crash of glass. I continued stumbling until I felt the wall behind my back. I stared back at her in stunned disbelief. Her eyes were brimming with tears, her dress hanging off of her in tatters. How the fuck had it gotten so far out of hand so fast??

“I’m sorry,” I gasped hoarsely. “I’m sorry. I’m so sorry.” The apologies just kept pouring out of my mouth. I couldn’t stop them. Even though they were empty, useless words, I couldn’t stop them. When the supply finally ran out, we just stared at each other across the room, both of us afraid to speak. It seemed like an eternity that I stared into her sad eyes.

“You need to be far away from me,” I said quietly.

“No, Edward...no,” she moaned, the tears running down her face.

“Yes, you do,” I said slowly. Then I turned, without looking back, and walked away. Down the

hallway. Into the bedroom, and out the doors. I didn't know where I was going, but it didn't matter as long as it was far away from her.

"No, Edward!" she wailed. Her cries followed me through the house. I ignored her hands clutching at me, at my clothes. I ignored her pleading and crying, even though the sound cut through me like a knife. She clung to me as I walked out the doors. I pushed her away as gently as possible before continuing on out into the sand.

"EDWARD!" she screamed. "Don't you dare walk away from me! *DON'T YOU DARE!!*"

Her voice was at a volume I'd never heard before. It was enough of a shock to stop me in my tracks. I still had my back to her, but I stopped.

"If you walk away from me, I'll never forgive you." Her voice was low, shaking with emotion and tears.

She was waiting for me to make the decision. There was nothing to think about. Where could I go? So I turned around to face her and to face what I'd almost done.

"It's not all your fault," she said quietly. "I asked you to."

It was unbearable for me to listen to her take the blame, like she always did. "That's ridiculous." I laughed harshly. "There's absolutely nothing wrong with wanting to make love to your husband on your honeymoon. None of this is your fault."

"But—" she started.

"See what happens when I lose control?" I continued, interrupting her before she could argue. "Do you see now what I'm afraid of?"

"But the minute I said something, you stopped," she reasoned. "As long as you can stop, it'll be all right."

"Bella! Do you hear yourself? Do you hear what you're saying?" The anger was coursing through me now and I let it. The frustration poured out of me unabated. "You have no idea what was going through my head in there! You can't even conceive of the...the...*violence* that was inside of me pushing to get out! The things I wanted to do to you, no human could have survived it! I'm a vampire! No matter how much I want it to be different, it's not! What happened in there was normal for me! That's me, that's who I am!"

"I don't care!!" she shouted. "I love you. It doesn't matter!"

We just stood there and stared at each other, helpless. There was nothing else to say; we'd said it all. The anger and hurt was gone and there was nothing left to take its place.

Suddenly, the ocean breeze gusted and blew her hair across her face. The remnants of her dress fluttered along with it. She reached up unthinking and brushed it away, a gesture I'd witnessed a million times since I'd met her. But here, on this beach, in the fading twilight, with the wind swirling her hair around her and the torn dress hanging on her in shreds, with that simple gesture, she was the most beautiful woman I'd ever seen—wild, primitive, and so alluring. That was when the love rushed in and filled the empty space left by the anger.

"Bella," I said. Before I could finish, she was in my arms holding me as tightly as she could. I

buried my face in her hair and held onto to her for dear life. “This should be so easy.”

Then she pulled back and looked up at me. “Nothing’s ever been easy for us. We’ll work it out together. That’s what married people do. They don’t walk away. They face their problems together.”

I took her face between my hands and kissed her deeply with a passion that had nothing to do with sex and everything to do with love and acceptance. When the kiss finally ended, we stood together on the beach, embracing without speaking, with the moon just starting its journey upward into the sky. Neither one of us knew what this life had in store for us, but whatever happened, our love was strong enough to withstand it.

“I love you,” I said finally. She smiled up at me. “And you need to eat.”

“I just can’t escape being human.” She laughed and immediately the stress and intensity of the moment rushed away with her light-hearted joke.

We walked arm-in-arm back into the house and on into the kitchen. We both worked together at fixing her a cold sandwich. She ate quickly and not a crumb went to waste. As she was cleaning up, she posed an unexpected question to me.

“Can we move into the other bedroom tonight? The blue one?”

“I suppose. The bed’s smaller, but I don’t mind,” I said, smiling.

“It’s just, we’re tracking those feathers all through the house,” she said with a crooked grin.

“Tell you what. I’ll agree to move into the blue bedroom if you do something for me.”

“What?” she asked suspiciously.

“Wear one of those skimpy nightgowns to bed tonight, one that I haven’t seen yet,” I answered, smiling.

She wrapped her arms around my neck and grinned seductively. “Any color preference?”

I thought for a moment.

“Red,” I said finally.

The Sandcastle

The afternoon sun filtered through the blue silk drapes, bathing the dark room in muted light. Bella was still sleeping soundly. Her body was spooned inside of mine once again. It was my most favorite of her sleeping positions.

She was probably going to be disappointed that the red nightgown had failed in its purpose. As soon as her head had hit the pillow last night, she had started drifting off. I wondered if perhaps I was demanding too much of her, if I should let her rest more instead of dragging her all over the island. Her increased fatigue was becoming a cause for concern. Then I chastised myself for doing exactly what Bella disliked: I was being too overprotective. She was human, after all.

Once again, I had spent a great deal of the night searching for an answer, a way to make love to my wife without hurting her. The debacle in the den last night made me realize that my control was slipping with each passing day. And after all the hours of analysis, there was only one thing of which I was absolutely certain: I had made a terrible mistake. Denying the overwhelming need we had for each other had been an incredibly stupid thing to do.

Frustrated, I turned my attention away from the problem to gaze at my wife. I never tired of looking at her, touching her and watching her sleep. I stroked my fingers lightly down her arm, and then on to the red silk that covered her side. I loved the feel of silk beneath my hands. I smiled to myself. Alice knew what she was doing when she packed these things.

I ran my hand lightly down to her thigh where the red silk ended and the softness of her bare leg started. Curious, I gently lifted the hem of silk, just a bit, to see what was underneath. I was careful to keep my touches light so as not to awaken her. I caught a glimpse of incredibly tiny, red silk panties with a thin band of lace serving as the waistband. I squeezed my eyes shut and tried to erase the image from my mind. *What are you doing, Edward?*

My hand wasn't listening to the screaming in my mind. It slid slowly over the rise of her hip, my fingers probing lightly under the thin lacy waistband. As my hand inched further downward, I thought about waking her up. My body was aching for her. *Maybe we should try again.* I wanted her so much it hurt. Without thinking, I pressed hard up against her. A loud moan unexpectedly escaped my lips.

She stirred briefly and then started to roll over. I quickly removed my hand from her panties and rolled over onto my back. She sleepily followed me, her body now sprawled across mine, her head and hair lying on my chest and our legs entwined. She flung out her arm and her hand came to rest in the worst place possible. This time I managed to stifle the moan before it got out. I listened closely to her breathing: she was still sleeping.

The heat of her hand was burning through the cloth of my boxers. The scent of her hair just beneath my chin was intoxicating. Damn. I stilled my body and stopped breathing. I gritted my teeth and fought my way through the need. I had to buy an air conditioner. I couldn't take much more of this.

I reached down and very gingerly moved her hand and placed it on my stomach; it was limp and heavy from sleep. She murmured something unintelligible and then snuggled her body closer against mine. She was coming awake now. I smiled and waited rather impatiently for those brown eyes to open and lock onto mine. It was what made every day of this existence worth living.

She finally raised her head and rested her chin on my chest. Those sleepy, brown eyes found mine. “Good morning,” she murmured.

“Morning,” I answered. My hands automatically found their way to her tangled hair. I tugged gently at her head, pulling her closer. I wanted to kiss her—the urge was almost unbearable—but she smiled and clamped her mouth closed in a tight, straight line.

“Bella, stop.” I chuckled as I teased her mouth with mine. Not even the touch of my tongue could pry it open. “Bella,” I growled lowly, pretending anger.

She shook her head and then slid out of my arms and rushed to the bathroom in a blur of red silk. Before I knew it, she was back in my arms, smiling widely, her face flushed. “Morning breath,” she explained.

“Bella.” I spoke softly as I stroked her hair. “That doesn’t matter to me. You always taste, and smell, absolutely delicious.”

“Well, it matters to...” she started, but she never got a chance to finish her thought. I smothered the rest of the sentence with kisses. First her top lip, then the bottom one. Then our tongues touched and entwined in a deep, probing kiss. We both moaned at the pleasure rushing through us. We both wanted more, but I didn’t have an answer yet. So, I stopped the kiss before it undid us both. She whimpered her displeasure, but didn’t protest.

“What would you like for breakfast?”

“Actually, I’d like to stay in bed for awhile, and...talk,” she said quietly, her voice suddenly serious.

“All right. If that’s what you want,” I said hesitantly. “What would you like to talk about?”

She was silent for a few moments. “I’m sorry,” she whispered.

“You don’t have any—” I started, but she interrupted me before I could go on.

“Edward, please listen,” she said with a frown. “I’m sorry about the way I’ve been behaving. The rum thing, and the way I yelled at you that day in the jungle, and the water bottle thing, too.”

“Bella...” I started softly.

“I haven’t been acting very mature. I’m sorry.”

“Every single time you’ve yelled at me, I’ve deserved it,” I said. “You have absolutely nothing to be sorry for.”

“Edward, don’t do that. I haven’t been very nice to you the past couple of days and I wanted you to know I was sorry.”

“Apology accepted then,” I conceded as I pulled her face closer to mine.

“No more yelling,” she stated emphatically, as she nibbled and sucked at my bottom lip.

“No more yelling,” I whispered back as I moved my lips lazily over hers.

“No more getting drunk, either,” she murmured as her lips moved from mine and traveled down my jaw line.

“No, definitely no more of that.” I sighed as her tongue teased at my ear, and my hands played lightly down her back.

“No more wet t-shirts, either,” she whispered as she returned and proceeded to kiss every inch of my face.

“Now wait a minute.” I chuckled quietly. “That’s a little drastic.”

She giggled and then crushed her mouth to mine. I loved her and I wanted her so badly I could taste it. I silently vowed to spend the rest of the day searching for a solution. There had to be a way, something I was missing. She pulled back, stopping the kiss. Her breath was uneven and ragged, as was mine. The look in her eyes stirred the lust in me.

“Let’s go get you something to eat and then we’ll figure out what to do with the rest of the day.” That was the last thing I wanted to do, but I couldn’t afford to lose control again. There could never be a repeat of last night.

She showered and changed while I prepared her a simple breakfast of eggs and pancakes. I watched in shock as she devoured it like she had been without food for days! What was going on with her? I had to force myself not to ask. I didn’t want to ruin the day with my needless worrying.

We decided to take it easy and stick close to the house. We walked slowly up and down the beach, hand-in-hand, and talked about inconsequential things. Occasionally we’d stop to pick up a shell that caught her attention. Then the breeze would lift her hair and I’d pull her to me. We’d kiss and touch without any urgency whatsoever.

We waded at the edge of the surf, and enjoyed the feel of the warm, salty water licking at our legs. We sat in the shade of a palm and gazed out at the ocean, our hands clasped tightly together. Then we laughed like children as we played with each other’s feet in the sand. We both felt so comfortable, so at ease with each other that afternoon. It was the best day I’d spent with her since we’d arrived on the island. I only wished the night could be just as special.

“Let’s build a sandcastle together,” she blurted out suddenly.

I shrugged and laughed. “Sure, why not.”

She was smiling and bubbling with excitement. “Do you have any of those plastic pails and shovels?”

“No, I don’t think so,” I mused. “But I’ll go grab some things out of the kitchen cabinets that might work. You pick out a spot and I’ll be right back.”

When I returned, she had chosen a spot about five feet from the edge of the surf. A sandcastle built there would be gone by tonight. “Don’t you want to build it a little further back?”

“No way. This sandcastle’s going to have a moat, and we need to be close to the water for that.”

We sat in the sand opposite each other and began building our sandcastle using the plastic bowls and pitchers I’d robbed from the kitchen. We talked idly as we scooped sand into the containers

and then placed round towers all over the place.

“Does your family build sandcastles when they’re here?” she asked curiously as she patted and packed the sand.

“Uh, yeah,” I said with a laugh. “But they’re a little bigger.”

“How big?” she asked curiously.

“Well, let’s just say we have to build ours a little farther up the beach. There’s not enough sand here,” I said with a wink.

“Not enough sand?!” she gasped, her mouth open in surprise.

I just shrugged and smiled. Our sandcastles tended to run along the lines of gigantic. She giggled as she continued patting and tracing imaginary slotted windows into the sandcastle’s walls.

“So, who’s the designated destroyer in your family?” she asked with a sly grin.

I looked at her in puzzlement.

“Who gets to tear the thing down?” she asked.

“Oh, that would be Emmett. We have to threaten him to keep him away from it until it’s finished.”

“Well, we’re not tearing this one down. The ocean can carry it away,” she said.

At some point, we decided we were finally finished. I sat back on my heels and looked at it, trying to hold back my laughter. It was the most ridiculous looking castle I had ever seen. She evidently agreed. She had her hand over her mouth, struggling to keep from breaking out into hysterics.

“I took some architecture classes, you know.” I grinned crookedly. “But I’m not sure what style this is.”

We both sputtered and laughed until she complained of her side hurting. Then she informed me that it wasn’t finished yet. We still had to build the moat. We worked at scooping out sand to form about a three-inch-deep trench all the way around the castle. Sweat was beginning to bead up on her face, but she worked enthusiastically, only occasionally stopping to meet my eyes and smile. Finally the moat was complete. I suggested a rest, and she willingly agreed, crawling over the sand to sit up against my chest. We sat together for awhile, kissing and laughing at our creation, before we finally got up to finish.

“Now we need to dig a ditch from the edge of the surf over to the moat,” she instructed, with her brows drawn together in serious thought.

“I’m on it,” I said with a chuckle. I quickly dug a small ditch starting at the front of the castle moat and leading almost to the edge of the ocean, deliberately leaving the last bit undone. “Ready?” I asked, waiting for her to give the signal.

She nodded.

I dug the last bit of sand out and the ocean water rushed in, surging through the small channel with unexpected power. It hit the castle seconds later and took part of the front away with it.

“It’s too powerful! Hurry, divert some of the water off before it tears it up!” She was wailing as she frantically started digging a ditch off to the side. I quickly did the same, except on my side.

When we were done, the water was lapping gently now into the moat without doing any more damage. The two ditches we’d dug on either side had effectively channeled off the excess water. Bella was repairing the damage to the castle, but I was staring in surprise at what we’d just done. My mind was stunned at the simplicity of the solution. Why hadn’t I thought of it before??

It was Physics 101, in a convoluted kind of way. Conservation of Mass-Energy: the total energy in a closed or isolated system is constant.

But what if something was to happen and the system wasn’t closed? If the system wasn’t closed then energy could be diverted, and energy diverted was less powerful, less damaging. The energy of the water in the small ditch had been overwhelmingly devastating in its power, tearing up the castle in the process, but its power had been lessened with the addition of the two side channels. The energy was no longer destructive.

There would be no more bruises. I wouldn’t hurt her. Could I possibly channel the excess energy in my body to someplace else? And if so, where? And would it work? My mind worked furiously, studying the problem from every angle, as Bella finally noticed my inattention.

“What are you thinking?” she asked curiously.

“I was just thinking that you’re a genius.” I said, smiling hugely.

Sheer Black Sex

Chapter Notes

I started writing this part with the intention of following the events in BD, where Bella wakes up from having the dream, Edward comforts her, and then they eventually end up making love again. Well, let's just say I wrote it that way and it sucked. So, I backspaced over it all and rewrote it MY way. You will find nothing of Stephenie Meyer in this chapter. Gone is the whole Dartmouth thing (it will be mentioned later), the nightmares about the boy and the Volturi, and Edward's anger over the black nightie. I just didn't like the way it all happened in the book. So, I hope you like my version, even though it is vastly different.

"A genius?" she asked, confused.

"Yeah, you saved our incredibly...*beautiful*....castle with your quick thinking. I'm impressed," I said, smirking.

She put her hands on her hips and glared playfully back at me. "I *did* pay attention in school once in a while, you know."

"When you weren't mooning over *me*." I laughed and was already ducking when I said it. And sure enough her hand glanced playfully off my shoulder.

"You know what? I think there's a camera in one of my suitcases. I'm going to take some pictures of our magnificent sandcastle for posterity."

While she was gone, I stared, bemused, at the castle with its haphazard walls and towers, and its moat. In my mind, it was now the most beautiful creation I had ever seen for it had provided me with a possible solution that I'd been seeking for days. I was secretly glad she was going to take a picture of it.

When she returned we took tons of photos: of the sandcastle, of me in front of the sandcastle, of her in front of the sandcastle. But she didn't stop there. She started taking pictures of everything: the ocean, the house, palm trees, seaweed, the distant cliffs, and way too many of me. We took some together with her holding the camera out in front of us at arm's length—first smiling, then laughing, then kissing. I was finally able to wrest the camera out of her hands long enough to take some shots of her. With the ocean breeze rifling her hair and her wide, joyful smile, she was, at that moment, the most beautiful woman on the planet.

The afternoon turned quickly into evening and, for once, she complained about being hungry. We walked slowly, arm-in-arm, back into the house to settle in for the night.

"I'm going to take a shower before dinner," she announced as we walked in.

"You really like that shower, don't you?" I asked, smiling quizzically.

"Some of us have to keep ourselves clean and smelling nice," she said with a small ironic smile.

“Besides, I love all the jets. Water comes at you from all directions. It just feels so amazing and relaxing. You should try it.”

The idea of being with her in the shower was very appealing. If this “solution” worked out, I just might join her one evening. “What would you like for dinner?” I asked, changing the subject.

She smiled, and reached up and pecked me lightly on the lips. “Surprise me.”

While she was showering, I made a quick detour into the den and cleaned up the worst of the broken glass, returned the coffee table to its upright position, and sat the remnants of the lamp in the corner. Then I hurried into the kitchen to prepare her dinner. The entire time I worked, a part of my mind was studying the possible solution to our problem.

I decided to keep dinner simple tonight: lightly seasoned sautéed shrimp with vegetables. She arrived in the kitchen in a thin, clingy bathrobe. Her hair was damp and the smell of it saturated the room. I luxuriated in her warmth and aroma while I sat across from her and watched her eat. She moaned and exclaimed with delight at the food, and once again ate like she was famished. She offered to help me clean the kitchen, but I refused her help. Instead, I suggested she get ready for bed and then I would join her shortly.

She wrapped her arms around my neck. “So, should I wear another one of Alice’s nightgowns tonight?” she asked slyly.

I smiled down at her. “By all means.”

“Any color preference?”

I thought for a moment. “Surprise me.”

When I finally arrived in the bedroom, she was in the bathroom with the door shut. I undressed down to my boxers, rummaged around in my carry on bag for a book, and then sprawled out onto the bed to wait for her. I was just getting into my reading when the bathroom door opened. Out she walked, hesitant and shy, until she was standing just a few feet from my side of the bed.

There was only one word to describe what she was wearing: sex. Not just sex, but sheer black sex. The nightgown clung tightly to her skin from the bodice down to her hips. Her breasts peeked through sheer black cups. Black silk designs that resembled flowers were sewn into the black netting all down the front. The sheeriness ended barely in time, leaving only a small triangle of black silk to hide her in front. The leg openings arched high up on her hips, leaving a long expanse of bare leg in its wake. Tiny black straps held it all up and disappeared over the backs of her shoulders.

“Do you like it?” she asked timidly.

How could she possibly believe otherwise? “You’re beautiful, as always,” I said softly, as I dropped my book aimlessly to the floor and sat upright on the edge of the bed.

She smiled at my answer and turned around to show me the back. I wished she hadn’t, but I was glad she did. It was even worse—or better, depending on how you looked at it—than the front. Thin black straps crisscrossed her back in a surprisingly erotic fashion. The entire lower part was sheer black netting, and it rode high upon her hips just like the front. Truth be told, there was probably more fabric in a washcloth than the amount being used to cover her behind. Needless to say, there was more of her bottom exposed than there was covered, and it was a decidedly

luscious sight.

She slowly turned back around. What she saw in my eyes caused her breath to hitch. We stared, motionless, at each other for what seemed like an eternity. Then without any thought or hesitation, I slowly extended my arm and gestured to her with my hand. She walked cautiously over to the bed, her eyes still locked with mine. When she was but a foot away, I reached out and grasped a pinch of black netting between my fingers and pulled her roughly to me. Her mouth quickly found mine and the kiss was hard, deep and intense.

When it ended, she pulled back, her breathing heavy and her eyes filled with longing. "I can't take any more of this. Please, don't push me away." Her voice was trembling, but barely a whisper.

I stood up and pulled her against me. My hand cupped the back of her neck underneath the waves of her hair. "I have no intention of pushing you away."

After all, theories were only theories until they were tried and tested. Tonight, I was going to test mine. Our kisses started out light, but quickly turned urgent. I buried my face in her hair and breathed her in as my hands moved slowly over her body. Her nipples hardened as I rubbed them through the black mesh with my thumbs. Her mouth and hands felt like fire licking at my cool skin as they moved over me.

"I want to feel," I whispered into her mouth. "Help me to feel, Bella."

She nodded breathlessly as her hands moved down my chest toward my boxers. I moaned when she ran her fingers lightly up and down the length of me through the cotton. Then, she pushed my boxers off my hips and they fell to the floor. I kicked them away with a hoarse groan as her hand closed firmly around me.

"Now, Edward. Please," she gasped.

The heat of her hand and her hot breath on my skin was pushing me closer to the edge. I wanted inside of her. My hands ran up and down her back, searching for a hook, a button, a zipper, anything that would loose the black lace from her body. I came up empty.

"How do you get this thing off?!" I asked in between her frantic kisses.

"It's complicated."

"To hell with complicated." I gathered the fabric on her back between my hands and ripped it down the middle. Then I pulled back from her and ripped the front in half. Black sex fell off her arms and onto the floor in shreds.

She pulled me onto the bed with her, and in one fluid motion I placed my hand against the headboard and drove into her. My fingers dug into the wood and I cried out as the heat of her body enveloped me. This is where I belong.

She clutched at my arms, moaning and urging me on as I pushed into her hard and deep with a fast unrelenting rhythm. Neither one of us was interested in soft, gentle lovemaking. We let the pent-up need of the past days drive us with blinding speed to the end. The pressure was building in me and I knew there was no holding it back. As I continued my pounding rhythm, I begged her, in ragged breaths, to go with me. Her body tensed beneath mine and I felt the heat spreading through her. The world started to disappear as she tightened around me. I barely had time to reach up and grasp the headboard before her body arched up against mine.

She went first, screaming my name, with her nails scraping across my back and arms. Then she took me with her. The orgasm slammed through my body with violent force. Everything in the universe completely disappeared in those few moments as it rode my body and ripped her name from my throat in hoarse, guttural cries. I emptied into her, over and over again, in endless spasms of gasping pleasure, and she rode it with me, all the way to the end.

When it was finally over, I relaxed my body, and let the world seep back in. The first thing that came back from the fog was her thrumming heart beneath me. Gradually, the ordinary sounds of life crept back in: the ticking of the hot water heater, the humming of the refrigerator, the endless sound of the ocean outside, then the realization that part of the headboard had broken off in my hand. Without opening my eyes, I dropped it to the floor and then rolled over onto my back. I sought out her hand and entwined my fingers with hers. We both lay quietly, eyes closed, for a long time, each of us enjoying the last lingering pulses of pleasure left behind.

“I feel like Jell-O,” she said finally, her voice weak with exhaustion.

I didn’t know what she was talking about and, at the moment, didn’t feel like digging into my mind to find out. “Jell-O?”

“It’s a dessert,” she answered weakly. “It’s soft and loose and wobbly and slick. That’s what my body feels like.”

“What is it with you and the food analogies?” I chuckled. “First it’s prunes, now Jell-O.”

“It’s a human thing. You wouldn’t understand,” she answered with a soft laugh.

Finally she slid from my grasp and padded into the bathroom. I let myself fall into that complete state of stillness that only a vampire can achieve. I basked in the afterglow as it washed over me unimpeded. I didn’t study it, didn’t think about it at all. I just relaxed and let myself feel.

“Edward,” she whispered. Her voice brought me abruptly back from my reverie into the present. I opened my eyes just as she snuggled against me and propped her chin on my chest.

I reached out and gently stroked her hair. “Did I hurt you?”

She shook her head and smiled. “No. Your touches were so light I barely felt them, but I think you hurt Esme’s bed,” she said, snickering.

I arched my neck back and glanced up at the headboard. Big chunks were gouged out of it in places, and a nearly two foot section was missing from the top. *Sorry, Esme.*

“I got the idea from you, you know.” I smiled when she looked at me in confusion. “The moat and the two ditches we dug. I channeled the excesses away from my body, and yours. Just like we did with the water.”

“So, does that mean that we can do this as much as we want, as long as you have something nearby to tear to pieces?” she asked, her face alight with amusement.

I laughed. “Apparently.”

“Ooh,” she cooed suggestively. We spent the next several minutes kissing and gazing into each other’s eyes, until I found the courage to say what needed to be said between us.

“I’m sorry,” I whispered.

“For what?”

“It seems like every time I think I’m doing the right thing, it turns out to be horribly wrong. I should have never pushed you away. I finally realized it was a mistake, but I couldn’t figure out how to fix it. I don’t know how you put up with me.”

She brushed her hand through my hair and traced her finger lightly down my face. “Everything you do, you do because you think it’s best for me. How could I be angry at you for that? You never do anything for your own selfish reasons. It’s always for me.”

I had to laugh then. “I’m the most selfish creature alive. If I had not given in to my own selfishness and pursued you, even though I knew it was wrong, we wouldn’t even be here right now. So don’t ever say I’m selfless. I can be incredibly selfish and self-centered when there’s something I want.”

“A little selfishness is a good thing,” she said. “By the way, I wish you hadn’t torn up the black nightgown.”

“Yeah, me too. I really liked that one.”

“I could tell,” she said, quirking her eyebrows suggestively. Then she turned serious. “I love you, Edward.”

“I love you,” I whispered. “Forever and always.”

She laid her head down on my chest and closed her eyes. We ran our fingers lightly across each other’s skin and soon enough her eyes were drooping with exhaustion. As I watched her fall asleep, I knew without a doubt, that I was never going to be able to get enough of her, no matter how much I tried. But I had to admit, I was looking forward to trying.

The Four O's

Patience was not one of my virtues, especially after last night. Bella was still sleeping after ten long hours. I chided myself for my selfish impatience. She was human. She had no choice but to rest her body but the waiting was maddening!

Thankfully her body was bruise free with the coming of daylight. Without the worry of that problem weighing on my mind, I was blissfully free to spend my time thinking about the pleasures of the night before. With her warm, soft body cuddled up against mine, I relived the moment of our joining over and over again. My mind caressed the memories of each touch, each sound and each pleasurable sensation that had ridden my body. But as the morning progressed, I grew tired of reliving the experience in my mind, pleasant as it was. What I craved, with a hunger almost akin to the thirst, was to relive it for real. I growled inwardly in frustration. *Wake up, Bella, please.*

I decided to do something, anything, to stave off my growing impatience, so I slid quietly from her side and padded into the kitchen. Bella was going to have breakfast in bed this morning. I searched through the refrigerator looking for the sort of foods that could be eaten quickly and with little mess. Bella would not have the time, or the inclination, for a long, drawn out breakfast when she awoke. I was going to make sure of that.

I prepared a continental breakfast of sorts, placed it on a bed tray, and carried it back into the bedroom. She was still sleeping, although she was now lying on her back. I sat the tray down beside the bed and crawled over to lie next to her. My patience had reached its very short end. I leaned down and planted a soft lingering kiss on her lips. She sighed sleepily, but didn't kiss me back. I supposed a more persuasive kiss was in order, so I nudged her mouth open with mine and kissed her more deeply. My tongue played at her mouth, tickling the underside of her top lip, slipping inside, just a little. Her eyes flew open and then she pulled her face back from mine in alarm.

"Edward!" she gasped with a look of sheer horror. I sat back on my elbows and watched, amused, as she slid off the bed and bolted to the bathroom. I chuckled as I heard running water and the brushing of teeth. I simply could not understand this obsession of hers about her morning breath. How could I convince her that she smelled just as lovely to me in the morning as she did any other time?

When she was back in my arms, smelling of mint, her mouth found mine. The kiss was deep and held promises of more to come, but I broke away from her with a chuckle and made her sit back on the pillows. I grabbed the tray from beside the bed and placed it across her lap. Her face lit up with surprise.

"Breakfast in bed?" she asked with a smile.

I nodded with a mischievous grin. "You're not getting out of this bed today."

Her eyes widened. "No bathroom breaks?"

"Well, I might allow you some human minutes, but that's all," I stated. "Last night was a little abrupt. Today we're going to take our time. Now, eat."

She looked over the items on the tray, and then looked back at me. "So, you're going to just sit there and watch me eat?" she asked uncomfortably.

"I'll find some way to amuse myself," I said, grinning crookedly. As she started eating, I kissed the line of her jaw, and worked my way back to her neck. I smiled inwardly as her breathing quickened, and her heart rate increased. As she nibbled at the fruit on her tray, I nibbled at her ear, nipping it gently with my teeth. Small sighs of pleasure drifted down from her lips. As she drank some of her juice, I drank in the smell of her skin and her hair. The luscious scent of her bathed my senses.

"Edward," she said shakily. "I can't eat while you're doing that."

"Just eat," I growled lowly near her ear as I nuzzled my face in her hair.

When her teeth bit into the bagel, my teeth grazed lightly down her neck. The sensation drew a long moan from my lips and a sharp intake of breath from hers.

"That's it, I'm finished," she gasped as she dropped the remains of her bagel back onto the plate. She pulled away from me to set the tray on the floor, and then rolled back into my arms. She gripped my hair in her fists and crushed her mouth on mine. She pushed her body hard against me as her tongue touched mine and our lips moved hungrily together.

"Bella," I moaned. I broke the kiss and pulled her gently from me. "We're taking our time, remember?" Her eyes were pleading and full of desire. I shook my head silently. "Lie down," I ordered softly.

She laid back on the bed, her hair spread out around her on the pillow. Her eyes, questioning but filled with trust, found and held mine. Her nude body was stretched out before me, open and inviting, begging to be explored. Smooth, soft, milky pale skin waiting for my touch. I moved over until I was nestled on my side alongside of her body. With our faces inches apart, I softly whispered my intentions to her. I let her know that her body was mine to explore, and I was going to take a very long time in doing it. Her breathing quickened, her heart was racing, her eyes fluttered shut, and I hadn't even started yet.

I began with her mouth. I kissed her over and over again as many ways as I could devise: long, soft lingering kisses; short, light ones; deep probing dances with our tongues. We nibbled and sucked at each others mouths, our moans mingling together as we toyed playfully with our lips.

Her body was restless against mine, pushing and prodding me to go further, but I shooshed her still. I kissed my way down her chin and her jaw. She arched her neck back, giving me full access to the milky white expanse of her throat. My breath caught as I ran my mouth and tongue over every inch of her skin. A tremor ran through my body at the mouthwatering sound of her blood rushing through the arteries in her neck.

I kissed my way to the hollow at the bottom of her throat and then lay my head on her chest. The frantic beating of her heart echoed inside my head. I marveled at the realization that I was the reason it was racing. My touch, my kisses. I had the power to do this to her. My mind and body thrilled with the knowledge.

I pulled my head reluctantly away from her chest and looked up at her. She watched me through slitted lids, her breath quick and shallow. I gave her a small smile before turning my full attention to her breasts. I ran my fingers lightly over her soft mounds. The chill bumps rippled across her skin; her nipples hardened beautifully right before my wondering eyes. The sight of them, hard and erect, never ceased to amaze me. I kissed them, and then sucked them gently into my mouth. They hardened even more as my tongue slid in circles over them. Her fingers knotted in my hair

and she pushed my head harder to her chest. I kneaded each mound gently, as I kissed, licked and sucked both at great length, her soft whimpers urging me on. She begged, pleaded with me to take her, but I fought against the urge. I wasn't finished yet.

She groaned in frustration as my mouth left her breasts. The lust filled her eyes and sent a rush of heat through me. My mouth ground on hers, hard and crushing. Her body kicked up against mine, her hand sought me out and gripped me firmly. It felt so damned good, but I tugged her hand away. I wasn't ready yet. Her chest was rising and falling with effort now, her whimpers almost continuous. I could see the desperate need in her, straining for release. I ached to give her that release, but I fought my own body's need as my hand slid between her legs.

Her breath hitched as my fingers tentatively explored her soft mound. She spread her legs slightly to allow me more room. I closed my eyes and listened as I moved my hand and played her with my fingers. It didn't take long for me to learn what pleased her most. As my fingers worked, my mouth moved over hers in concert, the both moving together in a passionate dance. She gripped my wrist in her hand and dug her nails in, groaning as I worked. My body was throbbing with need, but I ignored it. She writhed under my hand, her pleading coming in harsh gasps now. I moaned at the words coming out of her mouth and held myself back with gritted teeth.

When her cries became desperate, I kissed her quiet, and then thrust my tongue into her mouth. At the exact same time, I plunged my fingers deep into the heat of her. Her body arched up against my hand, and in a tight, hot gush of warmth, the orgasm shuddered through her. I swallowed her screams with my mouth as she repeatedly spasmed around my fingers and her body shook against mine. I listened in fascination to the sounds of her pleasure, reveling in the fact that I had given them to her. After it had run its course, we both lay quietly. I listened, with my head on her chest, to her heart slow and her breathing becoming more regular.

"Where did you learn to do that?"

"From you, just now." I chuckled. "I'm a fast learner."

I was feeling quite pleased with myself. I pulled her to me with a self satisfied smile and kissed her deeply. Her response took me totally by surprise. She whimpered and writhed her hips and guided my hand between her legs again. I gasped aloud and felt myself harden as I realized what she wanted. Her body never ceased to amaze me. I had no sooner slid my fingers into her than she was shuddering again, clutching at my arms as the orgasm tore through her. Its force dragged my name from her throat in deep moans. I groaned loudly along with her as I felt the power of it through my hand. This time I wasn't so anxious to move when it was over. I left my fingers in place and closed my eyes to the feel of small, lingering pulses against my fingers, the last erratic vestiges of pleasure left behind.

Then, she tugged at my hair and pulled my mouth to hers. She nipped at my mouth, darting her tongue in between my teeth. I pressed hard against the side of her thigh, wanting so badly to be inside of her that it was almost painful. Her hand sought me out again, but I shook my head, silently asking her to wait. I did, however, allow myself the selfish pleasure of rubbing against her skin as her hips writhed against my hand. And all the while, my fingers moved slowly and rhythmically inside of her.

My excitement grew as she once again tightened around me. My fingers were bathed in liquid heat as they probed deeper. Her hands dug into my hair, her body arched back and a hoarse scream erupted from her throat as the pleasure tore through her again. She begged me to enter her, and I wanted to, so badly it hurt. Instead, I pulled away from her and withdrew my hand. Then, I gathered her in my arms and held her tight, whispering my love into her ear, kissing her mouth

endlessly as her body quieted.

“How many times can you do that?” We were lying facing each other now. She positively glowed with pleasure and contentment like a well-fed cat curled up in a sunbeam. My own need had faded momentarily, but I wasn’t worried. She had the ability to bring it back with a raging vengeance with just a touch.

“I have no idea,” she murmured with a small, contented smile. “But it feels like I could go on forever.”

Forever. Suddenly I was looking forward to forever, if I could spend every minute of it doing this.

“But,” she said suggestively as she ran a finger down the side of my face and across my lips. “It’s your turn now. You’re going to lay back and let me explore you. You’ve been selfless enough for one day.”

I started to protest her use of the word “selfless”, but her mouth closed over mine and moved seductively, erasing my objections to her word choice.

“Tell me what you want,” she said in between kisses. There was not a moment’s thought given to my answer. I already knew what I wanted. It was what I’d always wanted from her, even from the very beginning: her touch.

“The touch of your lips, your tongue and your hands all over me,” I whispered against her mouth. Then she pushed me onto my back and proceeded to give me my heart’s deepest desire.

I closed my eyes and gave my body over to my senses. She kissed and played with my mouth, teasing me with her tongue and sucking at my lips, which drove any lingering thoughts I might have had completely out of my head. Then her lips were suddenly gone. A few seconds later, they were sliding down my neck, leaving soft kisses in their wake. Then they were back on my mouth, kissing and sucking, and drawing soft moans from my throat. Then they were gone again, only to reappear next to my ear. A shiver swept over me as her tongue darted inside it. Then, just as quickly her tongue was back, plunging into my mouth. The unexpectedness of never knowing where her mouth would end up next had my body tensed with anticipation.

Then she kissed her way down my chin and across to the other side of my neck. Her fingers trickled lightly down my arms as she planted a line of quick kisses across my chest. Each one felt like a small burst of flame licking at my skin. I gashed softly when she nipped and sucked at my nipples. *If that’s what she feels, no wonder she loves it so much.*

I dug my fingers into her hair and pulled her face to mine, devouring her mouth in a frenzy of tongues. Then she pulled away and was gone. I waited with anticipation, eyes still closed. Where would the next kiss fall? I felt her mouth where I least expected it: my inner thigh. Her lips teased and kissed down my inner thigh, and back up. Then they moved to my outer thigh, down and up. Then she moved to the other leg. Inner thigh, down and up. Outer thigh, down and up. The moans were coming out of me now in a steady stream. I had no control over the words that were pouring out of me. Every thought went directly from my brain and straight out of my mouth. Every nerve ending in my body was on fire. My hands kneaded the sheets as her mouth moved over my body: my legs, my hips, my stomach, even my feet. She kissed me everywhere except for the one place that was throbbing and aching for her touch. She had me begging now, pleading with her in harsh gasps to please, please do it.

Then her hands and mouth disappeared from my body. I lay waiting expectantly, eyes still shut,

my body trembling with barely contained lust. I heard her breathing, quick and shallow. She's enjoying this as much as I am.

Her fingers lightly traveled down the hard length of me. My hands balled the sheet up into my fists as her tongue did the same. Then her mouth. The heat of her mouth enveloped me and the sensations it brought had me throwing my head back in agonizing pleasure and gasping her name. I opened my eyes for the first time since she started and watched her take me into her mouth in a steady, slow rhythm. I moved my hips with her, the urge to push deeper almost overwhelming. The muscles were knotted in my arms and legs, tense from holding back the pleasure.

When I couldn't stand it any longer, I pulled her away and rolled her over onto her back. The need in me was an intense, overpowering force that would not be denied any longer. I pushed into her in a deep, steady rhythm. Her fingers were kneading my shoulders, and then raking through my hair, then digging into my chest. The luscious whimpers coming from her mouth only fed the fire raging in me. The pressure was unbearable and it was taking all of my control to wait for her.

Finally, her body tensed beneath me and became very still. As the orgasm tore through her, she fisted her hands in my hair and pulled... hard. Instead of being painful, it catapulted me headlong over the edge with her. Our hoarse cries intermingled as our bodies became one, and we clung to each other, gasping, as the pleasure washed over us.

When it was over, we lay side-by-side as a quiet peace settled upon us. We held hands and did nothing for the longest time except listen to each other's breathing. At some point her hand slid from my grasp as she made her way into the bathroom. When she returned, she nudged me over onto my side so that we lay facing each other.

"You tore another piece out of the headboard again," she said.

I glanced up and laughed. Sure enough, a one foot piece was missing from the other side of it. Poor Esme. I hoped this wasn't one of her favorite pieces, because it was destined to become a pile of matchsticks before it was over.

"What do you want to do with the rest of the afternoon?" I asked.

"You said I wasn't getting out of this bed today, remember?"

"Even vampires need some time to recover," I answered with a smirk. "Not as much as a human, but still..."

"I'll do anything you want to do. Explore the coral reefs, visit the sea turtles, hike through the jungle, swim with the dolphins," she said, smiling.

"You're suddenly being very agreeable," I said suspiciously.

"Well, I feel a little sorry for you," she said, barely containing her laughter. "After all, I did have —" Then she silently counted off one, two, three, four fingers. "—four, and you had how many?" Then she burst out in giggles. Wasn't she the smug one?

"I like to think that my one was better than all four of yours combined," I said, equally smug.

She laughed. "Oh, you think so, do you?"

"That's what I keep telling myself." I laughed quietly and pulled her into my arms.

“Happily-ever-after is finally going to happen for us, isn’t it?” she asked, suddenly serious. It was more of a statement, than a question.

“I believe so.” I smiled as I gazed into her warm, brown eyes. Nothing or no one was going to ruin our happiness and bring sadness into those eyes again. I would make sure of that.

“I love you,” she whispered.

“You are my life,” I answered simply.

Bella's Interlude

Chapter Notes

This story is written completely from Edward's POV (except for this chapter.) While I was writing, I began to wonder how Bella was reacting to all of this. So, I felt it necessary to take a short trip inside Bella's skin so she could describe for us what it's like having this amazing man make love to her. This is a one-shot deal.

I sat at the kitchen table and tried to eat the enormous breakfast Edward had prepared for me, but my eyes were continually drawn across the room to where he stood at the kitchen sink with his back to me. I watched him as he steadily and efficiently cleaned up. The muscles underneath his pale skin moved sinuously as he worked. I drank in the sight of his wide shoulders tapering down to a slim, firm waist. The dark blue knit boxers clung tightly to his hips like snug biker shorts, defining every inch of muscle that filled them. My eyes followed his hands as they caressed ordinary things: a washcloth, a spoon, a handle on the drawer. Long, pale, sensuous fingers that could pull breathtakingly beautiful music from a piano, or from my body.

I was just beginning to discover the wonders of the alabaster god who was now my husband. Last night, the DVD player had ran for hours, but neither one of us had watched the images flashing across the screen. We'd been too absorbed in our own emerging love story.

Edward loved to touch, and to be touched. I'd always known this about him. Ever since that first day in the meadow, I'd known how much pleasure it brought him, but I'd never realized the depth of that love until last night. A man who had lived over a hundred years thought nothing of spending hours just touching. His mouth and hands had wandered slowly over every inch of my body, touching places that had never felt a man's touch: the backs of my knees, my sides, down my back, over every inch of my bottom, and even my feet. I wouldn't have thought that a man gently sucking my toes could be an almost orgasmic experience, but when the man was Edward, it was.

Our lovemaking last night had been agonizingly pleasurable and slow. I'd learned something very annoying about myself since we'd become intimate: I was an impatient lover. I pushed and prodded at Edward constantly, pleading with my voice and my body for him to take me. But, the mythical being who was my lover had infinite patience. He enjoyed prolonging the pleasure as long as possible. I suspected he loved hearing me beg, for a small smile often played across his lips as his fingers played across my skin.

I drifted slowly back to the present and feasted my eyes on him once again. His back was still turned to me, but he was no longer moving. His body had gone still; his hands gripped the edge of the counter. *He knows I'm watching him.*

He slowly turned around and leaned against the counter. His golden eyes smoldered in my direction. My insides instantly melted. We gazed silently at each other across the room. There was no need for words between us; his desires were written in his eyes. *He wants me.* The golden heat of his gaze caused the muscles down deep inside me to clench tightly, and sent a rush of warmth into my panties. My nipples hardened as chill bumps scattered over my body.

He never moved. He didn't have to. His eyes called to me, pulling me up from the table and drawing me across the room. They followed me until I stood before him, our bodies only a hair's breadth from touching. His fingers brushed lightly along my jaw, bringing a trembling sigh from my lips. His cool mouth closed over mine, so soft and gentle, so unlike the hot fire burning in his eyes. He pulled my body into his as he devoured my face in kisses. I felt his hands travel slowly down my body until they rested on my bottom. He gripped me tightly and ground our hips together. Our moans mingled as hard met soft.

We were both breathing heavy as he scooped me up into his arms and carried me into the bedroom. He deposited me onto the side of the bed and stood before me. His eyes wandered over me, undressing me with their penetrating amber gaze. I felt the heat of a blush flood my face. He sighed as he took my face in both of his hands and kissed my cheeks, and then his hands pulled the nightgown slowly over my head.

I stretched out on the bed, waiting expectantly for his touch. I heard the quick rush of cotton over skin as he pulled off his boxers, and then felt the same rush as he pulled off my panties. Then his fingers ran lightly over my body like cool drops of rain in the summer heat. His mouth, tongue, and hands explored me and pulled soft moans from my throat. I closed my eyes and let myself fall under the spell of his gentle touch.

Then he shocked me as only he could. Edward is immensely curious where I'm concerned, and his curiosity carried him to a part of my body as of yet unexplored. My eyes flew open to see his head dipped between my legs. A deep blush rushed all over my body, my heartbeat accelerated through the roof. He chuckled as his lips trailed kisses down the inside of my legs. His chuckle soon turned into a ragged moan as I watched him lay his head against my inner thigh. He went still, only his heavy breathing revealing the depth of his feelings. I was confused for a moment before I remembered that there was a major artery there. My blood was calling to him.

He lifted his head finally and gazed up at me. A golden glaze of lust clouded his eyes, thick and impenetrable. I closed my eyes as he dipped his head down once again, and buried my hands in his bronze hair. His cool mouth caressed my skin, his tongue taking the place of his fingers. My fingers dug in his hair, turning it into an unruly mess, as he worked me lovingly, kissing me as softly as he would my mouth. My embarrassment soon gave way to pleasure unlike anything before. I no longer cared about what he was doing and where. I only wanted it to go on forever. I writhed under the caress of his mouth and once again, begged for him to take me.

But Edward refused to give me what I craved. His breathing was labored as he continued his relentless exploration of me. I looked down as his hands moved over my thighs and stomach. They were trembling, not from exhaustion, because my lover never tired. No, they were shaking because of the depth of emotion racing through him and the effort to keep the power in those hands at bay. Such extreme gentleness from hands that could easily kill me was the most erotic feeling imaginable.

I was destined not to linger long on that thought as the pleasure started rushing headlong to the surface. One minute I was languorously enjoying the feel of his mouth moving seductively over me, and the next minute the orgasm was unexpectedly crashing through me, sending my hips up sharply against him. I felt his cool fingers slip inside me and his moans mixed loudly with mine. Edward enjoyed my orgasms as much as I did. He rode them with me every single time, his body shivering with my pleasure.

Then before I could recover from the sensations flooding my body, I felt a long, hard coolness slide into me, a luscious length of ice that was my vampire lover. Instead of being uncomfortable, it was strangely arousing. That cold hardness sparked a flame inside of me that no regular man

ever would.

I listened for it, waited expectantly for it. Upon entering me, a long drawn-out, deep-throated moan always slid out of him, a moan of contentment, like the feeling of coming home after a long, tiring journey. The happiness in that one sound echoed throughout the room and sent darts of intense love directly into my heart.

Edward thought I didn't pay attention when we were making love. He was wrong. I was aware of every single thing about this powerful man who was loving me: the move of his body, the sounds coming out of his mouth, the expressions and emotions sweeping across his face, the shock of unruly hair falling over his forehead, the ripple of sheer power in his muscles, the feel of him pushing himself deep inside of me. Nothing escaped my attention.

I found myself becoming more comfortable with him the more we made love. At first I was hesitant, careful of the things I said and did. Now, I found myself making my wishes known to him without embarrassment. He always did what I asked. He enjoyed finding new ways to give me pleasure, to give us pleasure. I did that now. I whispered what I wanted and he moaned softly in answer to my suggestion.

He pulled out and scooted off the bed. I maneuvered my body until my hips were on the edge of the bed and I was propped up on my elbows. He was standing between my legs now, a pale marble god, ready to do my bidding. He pushed himself into me, as that beautiful moan slid from him again. Then he opened his golden eyes and watched. We both did. Occasionally our eyes met and held, or fluttered shut with pleasure, or a sigh or soft moan would escape into the still air. But our eyes always wandered back, mesmerized by the sight of fire and ice coming together, over and over again, in a long, slow, steady rhythm.

I watched intently as the muscles in his legs and stomach flexed with each stroke. Both of us were moaning almost continually now, but I was still aware of every movement of his body. There was such power in my lover. I could feel it radiating out of him. I wondered what it would be like to have him unleash the full force of it upon my body.

Hard coldness had now turned to fiery steel as he pushed deeper into me. The heat stabbing into me was pushing reality away to the far corners of my mind, but I clung to it long enough to hear what I'd been longing for: Edward was talking.

For years, he'd listened silently to my sleep talking, reveling in the sound of it and the words that came, unbidden, from my mouth. Now, *I* listened. The depth of his pleasure finally broke the barriers of control in his mind. Velvet vulgarities slid from his lips and fell softly on my ears. With his eyes closed tight with passion, words that he would never dream of saying in normal conversation poured out of him. Softly whispered profanities flowed over me, smooth as honey and caressing my senses, sending jolts of lust down to my center. This small loss of control was the most beautiful and erotic thing I'd ever witnessed in him. I lived for it, and did everything in my power to bring it forth.

But, once he started talking, I knew the end was close for him. I watched his body tense, his muscles bunched with the strain of holding back pleasure. For once, I held my own back and waited for him. He was begging me in short, harsh gasps to go. His eyes, a dark amber now, were thick with lust, his voice heavy with desire, but I held firm and kept control of the heat building in me.

Then a low throaty moan, almost a growl, issued from his clenched jaw. I felt him swell and harden even more inside of me. His eyes lost complete focus as he moved from the world of reality into that place where lovers go, a place where the real world explodes around you, sending

everything but sensation out of your body. Then he threw his head back and let out a deep, loud, hoarse groan of pleasure as he emptied the loneliness of a hundred years into me. Before I let myself join him, I witnessed an expression of complete and utter happiness sweep over his face. Only then did I finally let him take me with him. I screamed hoarsely as the orgasm shuddered through me, and was surprised that my pleasure was prolonging his. His cries of joy echoed off the walls in the still room. He moaned my name over and over as his body shook with mine and then finally quieted.

I watched his muscles relax and his face settle into a mask of calm quietness. How could this beautiful and loving creature think he didn't have a soul? He shared a small piece of it with me with every look, every touch, every kiss, every whisper, and every stroke of his body. Every single time our bodies merged, he poured it into me and filled me with a love so great that it overwhelmed me.

We were lying side-by-side on the bed now. His head was on my chest, his hand cupped gently around my breast, his cool legs intertwined with mine. I watched his body go completely still, vampire still. It used to scare me, but it didn't anymore. Edward was gone to his "happy place", as Alice called it. He was relaxing and basking in the afterglow of our lovemaking. My fingers idly twirled his messy, bronze hair, letting him know, with my touch, that I was still here and thinking about him. Occasionally a finger would twitch on my breast, his way of letting me know he was aware and thinking of me also.

As we lay quietly together enjoying the lingering glow of pleasure, I vowed that this strong, beautiful and sometimes vulnerable man in my arms would never suffer another moment of loneliness as long as I walked this earth with him.

Cliff Diving

Chapter Notes

I really hated the whole mess to do with the Brazilian cleaning crew. How incredibly stupid and a waste of good trees. Why in the world would Bella be unsettled by this woman's ridiculous superstitions or even CARE what a stranger thought about their marriage? So, it's only mentioned briefly in my version. There's a little fluff, a little lovin', and a little soul searching in this one.

Bella was up earlier than normal this morning. I'd reluctantly nudged her awake from her deep sleep because the cleaning crew was due. I wanted to make sure she was out of the house while they were here. Therefore, I had planned a surprise for her today.

"Do you mind eating your meal elsewhere this morning?" She'd padded into the kitchen fully expecting a grand breakfast. Her face fell at the sight of the empty table.

"Why? What are you up to, Edward Cullen?" she asked suspiciously. Her eyebrows were drawn together in the most adorable frown.

"The cleaning crew is due in just a little while. I don't want you here when they arrive."

"Why?" she asked.

"Why don't you go get dressed while I get your food ready," I urged. "I'll explain later."

She shuffled back down the hallway to the bedroom. I hurriedly packed the backpack with fruit, water and was considering what type of sandwiches to make when she returned. She came up behind me and wrapped her arms around my waist.

"What type of sandwiches would you like?"

"Uhhh, peanut butter and jelly," she answered.

The combination sounded absolutely terrible, but I did as she asked. I was just getting ready to wrap them in foil when she stopped me.

"Wait! Do you have any black olives anywhere?" I wasn't sure since I hadn't had occasion to use them in any recipes. We searched the cabinets and pantry until she finally found a lone jar. She exclaimed in delight as she wrenched the lid open.

"Put a bunch of these on them," she said, grinning. "For some reason, I'm craving black olives."

Peanut butter, grape jelly and black olives. What had sounded terrible before was now downright nauseating. I placed a few on each sandwich to placate her, but it obviously wasn't enough. She growled in frustration and grabbed the spoon out of my hand. I watched in horror as she heaped piles of black olives on all four of the sandwiches.

“You eat what you like, and I’ll eat what I like,” she said with a laugh. My revulsion must have been showing plainly on my face. I offered up a sickly half-hearted laugh as I proceeded to wrap the sandwiches and pack them into the bag.

I heard the boat arriving in the distance, bringing the cleaning crew. “They’re here. Grab a blanket and go out through the French doors. Wait for me on the other side of the house. I’ll join you as soon as I get them started.”

She frowned, but did as I asked. Within five minutes, the two Brazilians were knocking at the front door. I greeted them in Portuguese and gave them instructions as to what needed cleaning. I asked them to restock the kitchen, at which point Kaure, a coffee-skinned petite woman, presented me with a huge basket of fresh fruit. ‘A gift for my wife’ she explained. I could see the curiosity burning in her eyes as she searched the rooms for a glimpse of Bella. I offered my apologies, explaining that Bella was out for a morning walk and would be sorry she missed meeting them.

I left them to their work, which would hopefully take several hours, slung the backpack onto one shoulder, and went in search of Bella. She was waiting for me around the corner of the house, just as I had asked, with the blanket folded over her arms. I slung my arm around her shoulder and we started walking toward our destination.

“Why all the cloak and dagger stuff with the cleaning crew?” she asked as we walked.

“Kaure and her husband believe that I’m a Libishomen—a blood-drinking demon who lures beautiful women to their deaths,” I explained with a small smile playing along my lips.

“It’s incredible what some people will believe,” she stated, laughing ironically and shaking her head. Her eyes sparkled with mischief as she looked up at me.

“Tell me about it.” I smirked. “Seriously though, I didn’t want you talking to them. Kaure’s very serious about these superstitious legends of hers. I thought she might upset you.”

“I don’t care what she thinks. I know I’m safe. I’ll always be safe with you.” She smiled up at me. “So, where are we going? And more importantly, when am I going to get to eat?”

“We’re going to the cliffs.”

The night we’d watched the sunset we’d been on the side facing out into the wide open expanse of the ocean. This morning we were approaching from a different direction to the side where the cliffs were sheltered and loomed over calmer, deeper waters. After thirty minutes of normal paced walking, we arrived. Parts of the cliffs were anchored on land, but the parts I was interested in jutted quite a distance out into the sea and provided access to some of the clearest and most beautiful water on the island. We stopped at the water’s edge. Bella raised her hand to shade her eyes as she examined the towering cliffs before her. The wind was whipping her light cotton dress around her legs. *So beautiful...*

“What now?” she asked, dropping her hand and squinting into the sun.

“Hop on.” I smiled and turned my back to her. “We’re going up.”

She laughed as we climbed, her arms clutched tightly around me. In a minute or so, we arrived at an outcropping. I deposited her gently and laid the backpack and blanket on the ground. She stared open-mouthed at the view before her. We were nearly seventy feet up the side of the cliff on a ledge that was practically invisible from the ground. The view was a feast for the eyes. We

could see the house and all the surrounding jungle. The lagoon where she played with the dolphins was visible in the distance. The blue water stretched out before us, hugging the land gently in its relentless motion.

“Wow,” she whispered in awe. “This is beautiful.”

“Look behind you,” I murmured softly.

She turned and gasped, then squealed excitedly like a little kid finding a long lost toy. “A cave!” she exclaimed.

I chuckled as I watched her walk cautiously inside, as if she expected a large bear to jump out any minute. “It’s uninhabited. I’d know if anything dangerous was lurking behind a rock.”

She laughed at the obvious and started exploring more boldly. The cave was actually quite spacious, as far as caves go. The opening was over eight feet wide and almost as much high. Once inside, the ceiling loomed several feet over both of our heads. The room extended into the cliffs for about twenty feet before ending in solid rock. The floor and walls were rubbed smooth by water that had pummeled it relentlessly, eons before either one of us existed.

We spread the blanket out near the cave entrance and Bella dug out her food. She sat cross-legged and ate voraciously as I lounged against the wall near the entrance, my legs extended in front of me, feet and arms crossed. As she ate, I relaxed and gazed out at the view.

“You love this place, don’t you?” she asked quietly. I hadn’t realized she’d finished eating, so lost was I in my thoughts.

I smiled. “I do. It’s my favorite part of the island. I’ve explored every inch of these cliffs. When I first found this cave, I knew I’d found a home away from home. I know that sounds strange, but I felt immediately comfortable as soon as I walked inside of it. I’d hole up in here with a book and my thoughts while everyone else frolicked on the beach.

“Once, Emmett and Jasper ganged up on me, dragged me out onto the ledge and pitched me head first into the ocean. They said I was being antisocial.” I laughed. It was a fond memory, especially since I’d gotten my revenge on each of them later.

“They are beautiful in their own stark kind of way,” she commented.

“They’re so barren and devoid of anything but the most insignificant of life. Nature may wear away some layers through the centuries, but their sheer strength keeps them standing no matter what force tries to tear them down,” I said. “They used to inspire me, but that was before you came into my life. You are the strength that keeps me standing now.”

“Oh, Edward,” she murmured softly. She crawled over to me and sat straddling my lap. Her hands caressed each side of my face as her mouth closed softly on mine. When the kiss ended, she laid her head on my shoulder and rested against me. I enclosed her in my arms and we sat this way for quite awhile, just like we used to when we first met.

Finally, she pulled back from my embrace. “Whatever shall we do now?” she asked, smiling. She was planting soft kisses along my jaw as her fingers played in my hair. I knew what she was hinting at, and although I was greatly tempted, there was something else I really wanted to do. I just didn’t know how she was going to react to it.

“Well, there is one thing,” I said hesitantly. “It’s something I always do when I visit here.”

“What?” she asked with a puzzled smile. When I didn’t answer immediately, her brows pulled together in another adorable frown. “What, Edward? Tell me.”

“Cliff diving,” I stated shortly. Her reaction was immediate and exactly what I’d been afraid of. A combination of fear and sadness swept across her face for just an instant, and then was quickly replaced by a nervous smile.

“If that’s what you want to do, then go ahead,” she urged. “I’ll just watch.”

“I always dive off from the very top. Will you come up with me?”

“Sure, why not,” she said, smiling hesitantly.

She climbed on my back and clutched my chest tightly as I quickly covered the thirty remaining feet to the top. When she slid off my back she withdrew until she was standing well back from the edge. My heart fell in pieces as I watched her draw her arms tight across the front of her body. This same image had been thrust unwillingly into my thoughts by Jacob. It had hurt then, and it hurt now.

“Bella.” I walked cautiously over to her and gently loosed her arms. “You don’t have anything to be afraid of. I’m here with you. This is nothing like then.”

She nervously pushed her hair back and unconsciously let out the breath she’d been holding. “I’m fine. Please, go ahead. You’ve been entertaining me every minute since we got here. It’s time you did something *you* like.”

“It’ll be fine. I promise,” I whispered, as I kissed the top of her head.

I pulled my t-shirt over my head and deposited it on the ground. Then I stripped down to my boxers. I stood on the edge of the cliffs, over a hundred feet from the water below, raised my arms into a diving stance, then pushed off out into the air. I relaxed my body and gave in to the pull of gravity. The rush of the wind as I sped through the air was exhilarating! Too soon, the free falling was over, and the warm water enveloped me. I dove even further to the bottom, my eyes seeking out the wonders that lay hidden below the surface. I would have loved to linger there, but I knew Bella would be worried, so I shot back to the surface. I rubbed the water out of my eyes, and searched the cliffs for her face as I treaded water. She was on her hands and knees, peering out over the edge. I swam quickly to the cliffs and scaled them in less than a minute. She stood up and backed away just as I arrived. I edged over closer to her and shook my head like a wet dog. She laughed and squealed with mock indignation as sea water sprayed over her.

“That was beautiful. A perfect dive!” she exclaimed, laughing. “Do it again!”

“Why don’t you jump with me?” I suggested, smiling.

The laughter disappeared from her face. “I don’t think so,” she said nervously.

“You know I wouldn’t let you get hurt. I’ll hold your hand the entire time,” I said quietly. She bit her lip nervously. She was actually considering it. Perhaps a little prodding was in order. “Rosalie jumped off last time we were here.”

“Rose?” she snorted. “I’m surprised she’d chance getting her hair wet.”

"I don't know, she looked like she really liked it. I lost count of how many times she jumped," I continued, trying desperately not to smile.

She stood silently for a few moments, rocking one of her ankles back and forth, biting her lip. Finally, she settled on a decision as her face took on an expression of fierce determination. She bent down and grabbed the hem of her dress, and proceeded to yank it over her head and toss it onto the ground. She was now totally nude. She raised an eyebrow in my direction as a sly grin settled on her lips.

"I'll bet Rose didn't jump like this," she said with a smirk.

"No, thank goodness." I laughed and shucked off my boxers, and then grabbed her hand tightly. "So, here's what we'll do. On the count of three, we'll take a run and jump out off the edge, feet first. And don't forget to hold your breath," I reminded her.

"All right," she said. She was breathing deeply now as she tried to calm her nerves. "Okay." More deep breathing. "Count of three, run, and then jump." She started shaking her limbs like she was loosening up for a marathon or something. I laughed as she started taking ridiculously deep breaths, her mouth shaped in an o.

"Bella, love, you're going to hyperventilate if you don't stop all that breathing." I chuckled quietly. "Just hold my hand and you'll be fine." She clutched my hand in a death grip as she smiled nervously back at me. "You're going to love this. One...two...—" I glanced over at her and smiled in encouragement. "...three!"

We both took off running, hands gripped tightly together. She started screaming the minute her feet left the rock. As we fell out into nothingness together, I looked over at her face. She was screaming for all she was worth, but she was also on the verge of laughing at the same time. Such joy on her face! I had to remind her to hold her breath seconds before our feet hit the water.

We plunged deep into the warm waters, bubbles foaming all around us. The sounds of the world disappeared as the sea surrounded us like a watery cocoon. She still had a death grip on my hand. The second before I pulled her to the surface, she smiled—an underwater smile—teeth and all. Then we shot to the surface with one powerful kick of my legs.

When our heads broke out of the water, I was somewhat taken aback by her reaction. As I fought to tread water with one arm, while holding her around the waist with the other, she quite literally attacked me. Her mouth crushed on mine, hot salty kisses. Her hands rushed over my floundering body, then through my wet hair. Her breathing was ragged, her chest heaving with the overwhelming emotions running through her. I realized we were sinking when water rushed into both of our mouths during a particularly deep kiss, sending us both into separate fits of coughing and spurling.

"Edward!" She coughed and laughed. "That was amazing! Let's do it again!" Then her mouth closed on mine again. We started sinking again. Coughing and choking.

"Bella," I gasped, laughing. "I can't tread water and do this at the same time!"

"You're a vampire. You can do anything." She groaned as her mouth searched for mine again.

"I can't concentrate with your tongue down my throat and you doing that sucking thing with my lip," I said with a laugh. I pulled her reluctantly with me to the edge of the rocks. She climbed on my back and we scaled the cliffs to the top again. We jumped four more times together, and each

time we swallowed water as our kissing became more and more intense.

The last time we jumped and came up to the surface, she wrapped her legs around my waist. As I was treading water to hold us both up, I felt myself slide into her. We went completely under that time, swallowing enough water to have us both gagging and choking.

“That was very nice...” “I gasped while spitting sea water out of my mouth. “—but I think it would be safer for you if we got out of the water!” She laughed and sputtered as she crawled onto my back.

“I’ve found something a vampire can’t do,” she chanted in my ear in a sing song voice as we raced up the face of the cliffs back to the cave.

She dropped off my back onto the blanket and collapsed into a coughing and laughing fit. I laid down and propped my back against the wall and watched her. After she’d pretty much coughed herself out, she lay back on her elbows and gazed in my direction, her chest rising and falling quicker now. Her lips parted and she held my eyes as she crawled over and straddled my lap again.

“Who needs water?” she whispered seductively.

She lowered her body down onto mine very slowly, pulling a deep moan from my throat as her heat surrounded me. She gasped loudly at our joining. I wondered briefly if she was uncomfortable.

“Am I too cold for you?” I murmured as our mouths slid over each other.

“No,” she moaned into my mouth. “I’ve developed an appreciation for cold, wet things,” Then she laughed quietly, and the seductive sound of it shot through my body like an electrical shock.

Bella had shown me last night just how sensual it could be to watch our lovemaking. Once again, I forced my eyes open and watched, mesmerized, as her clumsiness completely disappeared. Her hips moved slowly and smoothly over mine, as mine flexed slowly upward in response. It was a thing of beauty to watch, like a perfectly choreographed dance.

I glanced up at her face and her eyes were closed tight. I whispered to her to open her eyes, to watch. She straightened her body. I pushed her wet hair back away from her face and cupped her breasts in my hands as both of us watched her hips move. We groaned together when we caught a glimpse of me sliding in and out of her. The sight was proving to be too much for me. I stilled her hips with my hands and lay my head against her shoulder. I drew her into my arms and held her as I fought against the pressure.

The scent of her wet hair and skin washed over me as I was gasping for control. Her neck was inches from my mouth, and I ached to run my teeth over it. Ever since last night, when I’d laid my head against her inner thigh and heard the blood rushing through her, I’d wanted it. I wanted to taste her blood again.

I pushed her hair over her shoulder and focused my attention on that luscious expanse of milky skin between her shoulder and her jaw. Inside of her, my body was reacting with sharp jolts of lust to every touch of my lips and tongue to her skin, every soft scrape of my teeth along her neck. Her quiet moans and sighs filled the air of the quiet cave.

She sensed what I wanted. She pulled back and played her fingers along my mouth, but I shook

my head. "No," I whispered. I didn't want her fingers this time. I leaned her back until my mouth could close over her breast. I explored each one with my lips and tongue, as my hands ran lightly up and down her back. She began moving her hips in a smooth, steady rhythm as I continued teasing her breasts with my mouth.

She dropped her head back and groaned as we moved together. Her fingers dug in my hair and I could feel her body tensing. As we both drew closer, I whispered what I wanted to do and she nodded back. I cupped her left breast gently and dropped my other hand to the ground beside me. My mouth hovered against the skin of her breast, in the small area above where the swell of it began, but below her pounding heart. Her hands kneaded my shoulders and fisted into my hair as her orgasm neared. As I felt the now familiar heat and tightness of her body surround me, I bit lightly into her skin, a superficial bite, only enough to allow a small trickle of blood to escape. Lust, heavy and intense, shot through my body at the feel and taste of her blood in my mouth. Her cries of pleasure only intensified the feelings flooding through me. My entire body shook against hers as the force of my orgasm stripped me down to nothing but sensation. In reaction, I drank deeper, pulling more blood from the wound. My pleasure continued and intensified. I swallowed more, the orgasm went on unabated. Then some more, the mind numbing pleasure promised to go on forever.

I suddenly came to my senses as I felt the venom start to flow into my mouth. I pulled violently away from her skin. "Get away from me! Go!" I yelled harshly between clenched teeth as I pushed her away.

She listened and scrabbled backwards away from me across the blanket until she was on the other side of the cave. She leaned against the wall, her chest heaving with the force of her ragged breaths, her eyes wide with alarm. "What's wrong?"

I shook my head violently and said nothing. I pulled my knees up and dropped my head onto them. I hugged my legs tightly as my body shuddered with the thirst. We sat this way for a very long time, me on one side of the cave shaking and moaning, and her on the other side trembling with silent unshed tears. It finally passed. I raised my head and stared at her. Her hand was shaking over her mouth as she fought not to cry.

"Are you all right?"

"I am now," I replied quietly.

"What happened?" she asked hesitantly.

I motioned for her to join me. She crawled toward me without any hesitation, and cuddled up against me. "I can't do that anymore."

"Why?" she asked softly.

"I almost couldn't stop, but it wasn't the thirst, at least not at first. The more I tasted, the more it prolonged the pleasure for me and then the more I wanted. That could become very addictive. Then the venom started flowing into my mouth. That's why I pushed you away," I explained.

"But I thought you said there wasn't any venom last time," she asked, puzzled.

"The only explanation I can come up with is I only had a small taste before. I drank a lot more this time," I said. "I'm sorry. It just felt so good." I sighed. "That was the last time."

"I'm sorry too." She leaned against me and lightly stroked my arm and hand. "Well, it was nice while it lasted."

I laughed quietly. Was there anything I could do that would truly horrify her? Her acceptance of the situation shouldn't have surprised me, but it still did. We lay quietly together side by side. I held her hand and enjoyed the silence and the comfort of her touch.

"I can feel your blood coursing through my veins."

She sat up and turned around until she was facing me. "What did you say?" she asked with astonishment.

"Your blood, I can feel it moving through my body. It's making me stronger," I answered quietly.

She smiled in wonder and placed her hand onto my chest. "A part of me is inside of you," she said with a sigh.

I laughed, partly in relief and partly in surprise. Her reactions were never what I expected, and this was no exception. I brushed my fingers lightly along her cheek. "A part of you has always been inside of me, Bella. Something much more important than your blood. You've given me your heart and, more importantly, your soul. The only one I'll ever have."

"You have a soul," she said quietly. "Every time you look at me with those beautiful golden eyes, every time you touch me, kiss me, or make love to me, every single time you do any of those things, you share it with me. I feel it pour out of you. It fills me with so much love, that sometimes I don't think I can stand it. Love like that simply cannot exist without a soul. Don't ever say that again." Her voice was soft and intense. "Ever."

I was speechless for a few moments as I thought about what she had said. 'Love like that simply cannot exist without a soul.' That simple, but profound statement, said it all, and it negated every single argument I'd ever put forth regarding my lack of one.

"You're right," I said with growing wonder. "Love has to live somewhere inside of you until it's awakened. It can't live in a lifeless heart, and the mind is too superficial to contain its vastness." I shifted my gaze to hers as the realization gradually dawned on me. "The only place a love that deep and all encompassing can dwell is in a soul," I whispered.

Her eyes filled with tears as she stroked her fingers down my cheek.

"Il mio cuore. La mia vita. La mia anima...per sempre."

"What does that mean?" she asked as she wiped the tears from her cheek.

"My heart. My life. My soul. Forever."

The Shower

"Mmmm, this is fantastic," she murmured in between bites.

Bella was perched on a stool at the bar, her hair in tangles, her eyes still filled with sleep. Even in such disarray, she was a vision of loveliness to me. I leaned against the counter and watched in amazement as she once again devoured her breakfast like she hadn't eaten in days.

"Uh, correct me if I'm wrong—" I mused with a mischievous smile. "—but won't you get fat if you continue to eat like this?"

"It's your fault. You always fix too much food," she complained good-naturedly. "It would serve you right if I ballooned up like a blimp."

"That would just mean there'd be more of you to hold onto." I laughed at her frown, and then she threw a strawberry at me, barely missing putting my eye out. "Good aim." I snickered. "What do you want to do today?"

"I don't feel like doing anything physical," she muttered. "The cliff diving was really fun, but it wore me out."

"Are you feeling all right?" I asked with concern. "You slept over ten hours." She'd taken a two hour nap as soon as we had returned from cliff diving yesterday. After that, we'd spent a little while moving our things back into the beige bedroom, and then we'd settled down in the den with a movie. I was a little disappointed that she'd fallen asleep within the first thirty minutes. It had been a lonely ten hours for me.

"I'm just tired. I can't seem to get enough sleep."

"Let's just hang around the house today then," I suggested. "There's that big empty bed back there." I quirked my eyebrow at her and grinned. "You won't have to do a thing. I'll do all the work."

"I'm not doing anything until I take a shower," she said. "I can't believe you let me go to bed like this."

"You were so exhausted, I didn't have the heart to wake you up."

"Well, I can't stand myself any longer. My hair is all tangled and I taste like salt," she huffed. She came around the bar and pecked my cheek then padded down the hall to the bedroom.

I watched her go, and then started cleaning up the kitchen, but my heart wasn't in it. My thoughts were following Bella down the hall to the bedroom, and the shower. I became preoccupied with wondering what showering with her would be like. Why hadn't she invited me in with her? She'd invited me once before. Maybe it was a relaxation thing for her. Maybe she wanted to be alone.

I sighed and began cleaning again. Maybe she was waiting for me to ask. I decided that was the reason. She was probably embarrassed, even though she shouldn't be, after all we'd done together. I growled softly in aggravation. No, that wasn't it. If she'd wanted me to join her she would have just asked, wouldn't she? Frustrated, I threw the dish towel down and headed for the bathroom. As I walked into the bedroom, I heard the sound of water starting up. It's now or never.

I was just getting ready to tap on the bathroom door, when it suddenly opened.

“Edward!” she exclaimed. “Oh, you scared me!”

“I...uh...I was just going to ask if you needed a towel,” I stammered. Why was I suddenly embarrassed?

“No, I’m fine,” she said, smiling as she peeked through the crack in the door.

“Do you need me to get your clothes?”

“No. I got them.”

I leaned my hand against the wall and looked at the floor while I wracked my brain for another excuse.

“Edward,” she said quietly. “Do you want to join me?”

“Well, it’s been awhile. I could probably use a little cleaning,” I said, smiling crookedly.

“Come here you.” She laughed and pulled me into the bathroom and into her arms. We kissed and then shucked our clothes off onto the floor. She started the shower and we both got in. I watched with a huge smile as she stood under the water and let it pour over her body.

“What are you smiling about?” she asked, chuckling.

“I’ve wanted to take a shower with you since that first night we came back from the meadow. Do you remember?” I asked. “I sat on your bed and waited while you were in the bathroom?” She nodded and smiled. “I wondered the entire time what it would be like.”

“So did I. Now we’re both about to find out, aren’t we?”

She grabbed the shampoo bottle, but before she could empty it out into her hand, I pulled it from her grasp. I poured a bit of shampoo into my hands. She smiled and turned her back to me. I’d never washed a woman’s hair before, but I was a fast learner. I worked the lather into her thick hair and gently massaged her scalp. I sighed with satisfaction when I heard low moans coming from her direction.

“Feel good?” I asked. The only response was another low moan. *I guess so.*

She rinsed and I thought I was done, but another bottle soon appeared: conditioner. I smoothed it into her hair and then Bella informed me that it should stay there for a bit. So while we waited for it to work its magic, we worked a little magic of our own with our lips. She rinsed and I had to admit, her hair was now as shiny and soft as silk. I supposed that all those bottles in Rose and Alice’s bathrooms served a useful purpose after all.

Then she decided *my* hair needed washing. I tried to tell her it wasn’t necessary, but my protests fell on deaf ears. I really should give thanks to God that He made Bella so stubborn. The feel of her fingers working the lather through my hair and kneading my scalp was amazing. I groaned aloud as every nerve ending in my body tingled.

“Feel good?” she asked with a laugh. I responded with a combination groan and chuckle. We changed places and I rinsed the shampoo out. I tried to refuse the conditioner, explaining that it would serve no purpose, but once again she insisted. I enjoyed the hell out of it anyway.

She grabbed the soap and silently offered it to me. I refused it. “No, you go ahead and do whatever it is you do in here for so long. I’ll just watch.”

I stood underneath the shower head and absorbed the warmth from the water as I watched Bella spread soap all over her body. My eyes followed her slow progress down her arms, across her chest, down her taut stomach. She bent over and lathered her legs and thighs, giving me a perfect view of her smooth back. When she stood back up, I’d had enough of watching. I stepped closer to her and ran my hands slowly over her soap-slicked body. I lathered her back as I kissed my way across her shoulder and up her neck to just behind her ear. Her hair still smelled faintly of strawberries. She moaned as my fingers massaged her breasts and eventually made their way further down.

Her scent was becoming more intense as warm steam filled the shower. I breathed it deep into my lungs while my hands moved slowly over her body. My head swam with a pleasant dizziness.

We changed places so she could rinse off her body. Then it was my turn. She spread the soap all over me. Not a spot was left untouched by her slick hands. I closed my eyes and let the sensations take over as her scent filled my body. Then she took me in her hand and began stroking slowly. I dropped my head against hers with a deep moan. I drank in her scent, pulling it deep into my lungs; my head was reeling. I swayed and by reflex put out a hand against the wall to steady myself.

“Are you all right?” Her hand stopped momentarily as she gazed into my eyes with curiosity.

“No,” I gasped softly.

“What is it?”

I laughed, low and quiet. “It’s your scent.”

“My scent?” she asked, puzzled.

I searched my foggy mind for the appropriate phrase and laughed when I found it. “I think the expression is ‘drunk on my ass.’”

“What?” She laughed. “You’re drunk?”

“That’s the closest I can come to describing it. It’s your scent. It’s so much stronger with the steam. My head’s spinning from it. The fact that I’m a vampire is the only thing keeping me standing upright at the moment.”

Her hand started moving again. I leaned against her and groaned softly as she worked. The scent was getting stronger as she stood underneath the warm water. Dizziness overtook me and I swayed into her, almost knocking her down.

“Whoa! Edward!” she exclaimed, laughing. “Maybe we should get out.”

No way. This feels too good to stop. I stepped under the water with her and rinsed all the soap off of my body. Then I pulled her out and nudged her against the shower wall. I pulled her legs up and she wrapped them around my hips. I braced myself against the wall and her body as I slid slowly inside her. A long low moan escaped my throat and mingled with hers.

As I moved inside her, I did what all intoxicated people seemed to end up doing: I talked. I

murmured softly in her ear every little thought that came into my head: how her body had such power over mine, how her touch, her soft gaze could turn my coldness to smoldering heat. I whispered to her of flames and how her fingers set fire to my skin. As she moaned in my ear, I told her of my love of her body, the pleasure of being surrounded by the heat of her. As I pushed us closer, I inhaled her scent continuously and gave myself over willingly to its power. I breathed into her open mouth words of love and lust as our lips slid over each other.

I was vaguely aware of her arm reaching out, grasping for something, but I was too far removed from the reality of the moment to really care. Then her hands were in my hair, clutching fistfuls tightly. Suddenly, all the jets cut on and we were inundated with water from every direction. Her body tensed around me, her fingers knotted in my hair. She dropped her head against my shoulder and let out a deep intense moan as I moved her closer.

As warm water beat across my skin, as my fingers clawed at the ceramic tiles on the wall, as Bella's heat tightened around me, I let go of the last remnants of rational thought left in my mind. I buried my face in her wet hair and gave myself over to nothing but pleasure, sensation, mindless joy. I reveled in hearing my name echo off the walls. My body shook against hers, my guttural cries were muffled by her skin. I gasped with utter happiness as her body shivered under mine. When we were both spent, Bella collapsed against me in exhaustion. I leaned against her body and held her, murmuring softly to her as the water began to cool. Only when she began to shiver, did I reach over and turn off the jets and then the shower.

We both dried off, and then I bundled her up in a larger towel. The heat of the bedroom quickly warmed her up. She shed the towel, grabbed a comb and sat down on the bed with her legs crossed. I quickly crawled up behind her and snagged the comb from her hand. She laughed and relaxed back against my knee as I began to comb out her tangles.

"I've been thinking about that whole Dartmouth thing," she said.

I raised my eyebrows in surprise, even though her back was to me. I wondered what had brought that up.

"I think it might be fun. Charlie would get a kick out of Dartmouth stories. But it might be embarrassing for you if I can't keep up with all the brainiacs. Still, it might not be so bad waiting until I'm nineteen or twenty to be like you. What's a year or two one way or the other?"

I was silent for a moment, stunned at how closely our thoughts were unknowingly aligned. I'd been thinking much the same thing these past days and had been pondering how to bring it up to her. "You mean you'd wait? You'd stay human?" I asked softly.

"Yes." She turned around and smiled. "Now that we can make love together safely, I think I like being human again."

"Thank you," I said quietly. "You don't know how much this means to me."

"I think I do," she said, smiling. "Do you think we can find an apartment this late?"

"Well," I grimaced. "We sort of already have a house there. You know, just in case."

"You bought a house?" she asked incredulously.

"Real estate is a good investment," I reasoned with an innocent look.

“So we’re ready then,” she said with one eyebrow raised.

“I’ll have to see if we can keep your ‘before’ car for a little longer...” I said with a smirk.

“Yes, heaven forbid I not be protected from tanks,” she said, rolling her eyes. “How much longer can we stay?”

“A few more weeks if you want, and then we can visit Charlie before we go to New Hampshire. We could spend Christmas with Renee.”

“That sounds nice,” she said. We wrapped our arms around each other and held on tight. I murmured my thank yous to her over and over until she finally told me, laughingly, to be quiet. I finished combing out her hair in contented silence. Bella had just made me a very happy man.

When I finished smoothing the tangles from her hair, she turned around and faced me. “Bella,” I started hesitantly, and then stopped.

“What?” she asked, her brows pulled together in concern.

“I was just wondering something,” I said. “Is it normal? This constant wanting? I mean, I find myself thinking about making love to you all the time. Is that...normal?”

She smiled and stroked my cheek. “It must be, because I feel the same way. When we stop wanting is when we should worry.”

“I don’t think I’ll ever stop wanting,” I said quietly.

She leaned forward and pressed her mouth softly over mine. Our kisses were tender, filled with love and respect and promises of a lifetime of happiness.

“I composed a poem for you last night,” I said after our lips parted. “Watching you sleep inspired me.”

“Oh, Edward.” She sighed. “Tell me.”

I stroked her hair lightly as her deep brown eyes fixed upon mine.

“Sometimes I think you’re just a vision in my mind. Something that my heart made up to pass away the time while it searched for its true love, and left the past behind.”

Then I smiled and caressed her cheek with the back of my hand.

“But if that’s true, could you please just stop and tell me why every time I close my eyes I see your smiling face?”

She smiled up at me, her eyes filled with a warmth only love can bring.

“And when I open them again, that vision is replaced with a woman who is warm and true, and says she loves me too?”

I cupped her face in both of my hands and leaned in close. Our breaths mingled as I murmured quietly to her. My eyes burned into hers.

“Could this loneliness be gone? God, I pray it’s true. For I have waited for so long to finally find a lamb. One so mild and meek so as to tame the man I am.”

Her eyes welled with tears, her lips trembled with emotion.

“But then there is this lion, this beast inside of me. He’ll never truly leave me; he’ll never set me free.”

A blink of her eyes sent a trickle of tears down her cheeks. I gently wiped them away with trembling fingers.

“And then you touch me softly, and tell me that love can unite these two so different, the lion and the lamb.”

AUTHOR’S NOTE: The poem was written by Randall Miller, an online fan who left the Twilight fandom several years ago.

Strawberries

Chapter Notes

This chapter is nothing but a pure unadulterated shameless lemon. And just for the record, I never intended for this chapter to end like it did. I meant for Edward to get to actually experience his suggestion to Bella, but she had other plans. *sigh* I guess we'll save his fantasy for a future chapter. P.S. I'm not taking the blame for it either. I blame it all on the fruit.

The next week passed quickly. We began and ended each day with a shower. Bella joked quite frequently that she must be the cleanest human on the planet and I must be the drunkest vampire in existence. It was silly, but we both laughed every time she said it.

We spent the daylight hours doing whatever appealed to us at the moment. Some days we wandered the island at leisure, talking and laughing, kissing and touching, always touching. Other days we never left the house, choosing instead to read a book to each other or watch a movie. We fell easily into the comfortable routine of a happily married couple who couldn't stand to be away from each other even for a moment.

I was the happiest I'd ever been in my life those seven days. Our relationship had reached the point where it was finally easy. I felt like a normal man for the first time. I had a beautiful wife who loved me and I could return her love without pain, without the thirst. For so long, everything had been so difficult for us. Now, both of us were practically giddy with the simplicity of our life, still somewhat astonished that we'd even reached this point.

I smiled as I leaned against the counter and watched Bella eat her dinner with her usual voraciousness. She was truly a lovely creature—so small and delicate—which brought out feelings of protectiveness in me. But there was a stubborn streak there, as well, which served to remind me that she was her own woman, with her own opinions and feelings. An eternity with her was sure to be very interesting and lively. I was looking forward to every second of it.

"That was wonderful!" she exclaimed when she'd eaten the last bite off her plate. "There just wasn't enough of it."

"After your comment about ballooning up like a blimp, I decided to cut your portions a bit." I chuckled. "Better to start now than when it's too late and you're so fat I can't get my arms around you."

She frowned, grabbed a strawberry from the bowl next to her plate and launched it in my direction. I dodged it easily, laughing and making fun of her throwing skills.

"I'm not fat," she grumbled with a half-hearted smile.

"Of course not. I was merely joking. You're still as lovely and beautiful as you were the first day I met you." I smiled, joined her at the table and pulled my chair out so I was sitting facing her.

I had noticed something different about her, though. I knew every inch of Bella's body intimately,

as well as I knew my own. Over the past week, her stomach had filled out just a little. No one would have noticed it except for me. Since my hands continually explored every part of her, I immediately noticed any change.

Bella had been right to chide me for preparing too much food for her. Evidently, it was easier for humans to gain weight than I had thought. I knew better than to mention anything to her about it. I'd overheard enough teenage girls' thoughts to know that talking about a woman's weight is just asking for trouble. So, I kept quiet and started cooking her lower fat, smaller meals with salads and fruits for dessert.

She smiled sweetly at my compliment and started in on the bowl of strawberries. My eyes followed her movements as she ate. I watched, mesmerized, as her soft, delicate fingers picked up a strawberry, as her lips parted, showing just a hint of teeth, as she bit down on the fruit, the juice pooling on her lips in tantalizing drops, as her tongue ran across them, gathering up every last drop of strawberry juice. Then she'd do it all over again, and I watched every single motion with fascination.

"Edward," she said, stopping her eating in mid-stream. "What are you doing?"

I came out of my reverie and sat up straight. "Uh, I was just watching you eat," I explained with embarrassment. I had never gotten so caught up in it before. *What's going on with me?*

"You're creeping me out," she said. "Stop."

I laughed and ran my fingers through my hair in discomfort, murmuring my apologies, but when she started eating again, I couldn't help it. My eyes strayed in her direction as if they were being pulled by magnets.

She stopped eating again, and then turned in her chair until she was facing me. "You're doing it again."

"I like strawberries," I admitted.

She looked at me with her mouth dropped open in astonishment. "You hate human food."

"Not strawberries," I said, grinning.

Then she pushed the bowl over until it sat between us. "Have some, then."

I pushed the bowl slowly back in her direction. "No, you misunderstand, love. I don't want to eat them. I just want to taste the juice—" Her brows pulled together in silent confusion. "—on your lips," I finished quietly.

Her eyebrows lifted in surprise. Her brown eyes widened. Her heart beat accelerated slightly. "What?" she whispered.

"Remember that last day in the meadow before we were married? You were eating strawberries almost constantly that day. And if you remember, I kissed you quite a lot that afternoon." I smirked at the memory. Things had almost gotten completely out of hand that day, and all because of strawberries.

"So, you like the taste of strawberries, but only on my lips," she said slowly with a small amount of confusion in her voice.

I nodded. "It's not just the flavor of the strawberries. It's the combination of the taste of your skin *with* the strawberries."

She stared back at me in silence for a few moments, and then she smiled a small, naughty smile. Soon, we both began enjoying the strawberries. She'd bite into a strawberry and purposely let the juice gather on her mouth. Then I'd kiss her, the taste of her skin mingling with the tangy juice as I sucked it gently from her lips, first the top one, then the bottom one. Then I'd pull away, just a little, to allow her room to eat another. As soon as she bit down on it, my mouth was there, sliding softly over hers. A particularly juicy one had me licking my way down her chin and back up, accompanied by her soft sighs.

I took the next one from her fingers after she'd bitten into it. I squeezed the juice out of it as I rubbed it slowly along her lips. I kissed her deeply, my tongue seeking the sweetness inside her mouth. Her soft whimpers filled the quietness of the room. When she pulled away, she tugged on my fingers. The half-eaten strawberry fell out of them and to the floor. She sucked the juice from each of my fingertips as her eyes fixed on mine. I moaned at the sight of my fingers moving in and out of her mouth.

When I caught a glimpse of her tongue moving down my finger, I lost it. I buried both my hands in her hair and devoured her mouth and face in a frenzy, my frantic breaths rushing across her skin.

"God," she gasped breathlessly. "I'll never look at strawberries the same again."

I chuckled deep in my throat as my lips touched to her neck, close to her hairline. At that moment I became suddenly and overwhelmingly aware of her scent. I'd been so preoccupied with the taste of her mouth, that the smell of her had been pushed to the background. Now, with my face buried in her hair, her scent overtook me, and something was different about it. I tried to pinpoint exactly what it was, but I couldn't think straight. My mind was in a fog, not unlike what I'd experienced while in the shower with her. I spent the next several minutes drowning in her scent. I ran my nose along her neck, across her jaw, down her throat to the hollow near her collarbone. I brought her wrist to my face and inhaled her perfume.

"Edward," she said. "What are you doing?"

I moaned and ran my nose up her arm to the other side of her neck. When I got to her ear, I whispered softly into it, my breath sending a chill down her body. "You smell amazing tonight."

"I thought I smelled amazing every night," she said, chuckling softly.

"Not like tonight." I gasped as I drew the scent of her deep into my lungs. "Tonight it's...I can't describe it. It's like its stronger, somehow, more intense."

I hadn't done anything like this since we'd first met. Then, the scent of her had been almost overwhelming, and I'd spent quite a lot of time exploring her body and desensitizing myself to it. Over time, I'd grown used to it, but I'd never grown tired of it. Her scent would always affect me as long as she was human. Tonight though, something about it was different.

"I think you're still drunk from the shower this morning," she said, grinning knowingly.

I snickered quietly, but that wasn't it. Whatever it was, I was enjoying it too much to give it any serious thought. I'd think about it later, when my head was clearer. "I have an idea," I murmured

softly against her mouth. Soft, insistent kiss. Top lip, then bottom lip.

“What?” she breathed.

Long, deep kiss. Tongues touching, probing.

“Let’s spend the night on the beach,” I whispered as I moved my lips along her jaw line. “And make love under the stars.” Kiss, lightly down her neck. Intoxicating scent. Dizziness.

She groaned softly. “Why bother with the beach? There’s a table right here.”

We both hesitated and glanced at the table at the same time. I think we both actually considered it for a split second. “Esme would never forgive me. This is an antique.”

She sighed. “I suppose you’re right.”

Countless kisses. Cool hands moving lightly down her chest. “We’ve been on a beach for fifteen days, and we haven’t taken advantage of it,” I murmured against her warm cheek. Soft, warm breasts underneath icy fingers. “Don’t all women want to make love on a beach?” Her eyes were closed and low moans were filling the room as my hands moved on her body. Breathless kiss. Chill bumps racing down skin.

When she opened her eyes and stared into mine, they were deep brown and filled with want. She wanted me, and the very thought always left me slightly astonished, but immensely happy.

“Edward.” She giggled softly, but breathlessly. “I might get sand in places where it shouldn’t be.”

Soft kiss. Nibble at lips. “Love, I wasn’t going to just throw you down in the sand and ravish you.” I chuckled as our mouths played together lazily. “Ever heard of a blanket? Pillows? We could make love, and then you could fall asleep in my arms to the sound of the ocean.” Fingers kneading softness. Quiet moans. Soft sighs.

“Goodness, you are in a mood tonight.” She chuckled seductively as her hand snaked underneath my shirt and teased along the top of my shorts.

I was, and I had absolutely no explanation for it. Something about her—maybe it was the scent or the taste of her skin—was driving me insane tonight. “So, how about it? Sex on the beach?” I murmured softly against her mouth. Hard nipples underneath my palms.

Her breathing grew heavy as my fingers worked. “But it’s dark out. No full moon anymore.” She gasped, and then moaned as I squeezed her nipples gently between my fingers.

“Candles,” I gasped harshly as her hand moved up my leg and brushed across the front of my shorts.

“But the wind?” Her heartbeat accelerated when she closed her hand around me through the cloth of my shorts.

“Luminaries.” I groaned low and deep in my throat as her hand started to slowly move.

“What?” she asked. Her hand stopped and I begged her softly to continue.

“Alice. Parties. Luminaries.” I hoped she understood what I was trying to communicate because I didn’t think I could form a complete coherent sentence while her hand was stroking me. I finally

tugged her hand away with a deep, disgruntled moan, before I completely lost it.

“You’re telling me there’s luminaries just lying around here somewhere?”

“I’m fairly sure of it,” I murmured. Bella was entirely too coherent at the moment. Time to turn the tables. Deep kiss. Tongues. Cool fingers crawling along silky skin.

“So? We’ve got blankets...kiss... pillows...kiss... and candles...tongues,” I whispered as my fingers slid up her thighs underneath her nightgown.

“Mosquito bites,” she said as my fingers found her warmth. Moist, slick wetness. Gently probing fingers. Deep moans.

“Mosquitoes avoid me,” I murmured against her throat. “I’ll be the only one nibbling on you tonight.” I playfully nipped at her neck.

A deep-throated groan escaped her as she suddenly got up and straddled my lap. I breathlessly pushed her nightgown out of the way as my mouth searched for her breasts. She ground her hips down against me and even through my shorts I could feel the heat of her. Her heart was pounding next to my ear as I nibbled at her breasts. We were never going to make it to the beach if one of us didn’t put a stop to this, and soon.

“Bella,” I gasped hoarsely as I tried to pull her hips up off of mine.

“No,” she moaned, her hands clawing in my hair. She fought against my hands as I tried to push her hips aside. “No,” she gasped. Her mouth closed over mine then, her tongue probed deep into my mouth. I felt the pressure building, felt the aching lust that her body always stirred in me. Felt the heat and wetness of her soaking through my shorts. Felt the almost painful hardness that was my need pushing back against her.

To hell with the beach.

With a frantic groan, I tugged at my shorts and managed to get them out of the way; our bodies came together hard. The heat of her always astounded me. It always felt new, every single time. I pulled her against me and buried my face in her chest as I pushed into her over and over again. She met each thrust of mine with her own. My hands slid over her sweat-slicked body and her scent, already agonizingly strong, seemed to intensify even more as she moved closer to the end.

I was losing my tenuous grip on reality with every passing second, with every breathless moan I heard from her lips, with every deep thrust into her body. Her scent ripped away any remaining part of my mind that connected me with the physical world. The low growl started deep inside my body and made its way through my gritted teeth as I felt her tighten around me. Her body shook against mine with the power of it, her screams echoed inside my head. I needed something to hold onto and ended up with her nightgown gathered tightly in my clenched fists. I heard ripping sounds as if from a great distance as the force of my orgasm overwhelmed me all at once. I buried my head against her chest; her hands were fisted in my hair. My harsh, guttural cries were loud, even as they were muffled against her skin. I moaned against her body long after she’d gone still. She held me tightly and ran her fingers softly through my hair as she waited for it to be over. Finally, the only sounds in the quiet kitchen were her heart’s rushed beating and my own soft moans. Eventually her heart returned to its normal rhythm and the noise coming out of my throat faded into the occasional sigh.

She chuckled softly. “I don’t think I can move.”

Without any effort at all, I stood and lifted her up, with one swift and smooth motion, into my arms. I carried her limp and giggling body down the hall and deposited her gently onto the bed.

“Sorry about the beach thing,” she said sheepishly as I lay down beside her. “I kind of got carried away.”

“The beach isn’t going anywhere. There’s always tomorrow night.” And the next night. And the next. And the next. For eternity...

We lay together and talked quietly before Bella finally pulled away from me. “I need to take a shower,” she said with a small grin. “I’m all sweaty.” She threw a suggestive glance in my direction. Surely she’s joking.

“I think I’ll sit this one out,” I said, chuckling.

“I love you,” she said softly.

“And I love you.”

I lay back on the bed with my arms behind my head and smiled in contentment as I watched her walk into the bathroom.

Life just doesn’t get any better than this.

Sex on the Beach

Sometime in the middle of the night, Bella emerged slowly out of her dreams. I lay quietly by her side in the darkness and listened to see if she was going to fall back asleep. After several minutes of tossing and turning, she huffed loudly.

“Bella?” I whispered.

She ran her fingers through her hair in frustration. “I can’t go back to sleep.”

“Are you ill?” I asked worriedly.

“No, just restless. I keep dreaming.”

“What were your dreams about?” I asked curiously.

She growled in frustration. “I can’t remember them.”

I gathered her in my arms and hummed softly to her. She snuggled up against me with a sigh. After several minutes of crooning, her eyes were still wide open.

“Sorry. It’s not helping.”

“Why don’t we get up and take a walk out on the beach,” I suggested. “The fresh air may help.”

“All right,” she murmured. “Just let me put something on.”

I pulled on a pair of knit boxers and joined her by the door. The moonlight was streaming in, bathing her in muted tones of blue. The outline of her body was visible through the thin fabric of her long dress. I smiled and grasped her hand, leading her through the doors and out onto the warm sand. We walked slowly in the dark with the stars serving as our candles. We talked occasionally, but it was of nothing of importance. Our bodies brushed against each other as we moved aimlessly down the beach. The breeze blew her hair across her face and molded her dress seductively around her body as she moved. The ocean with its unceasing rush against the sand felt strangely soothing. Eventually we stopped talking and just strolled through the sand. Then Bella suddenly stopped and looked up at the moon. A small smile played across her lips.

“Beautiful,” she said, her voice filled with awe.

I shrugged. “It’s all right, but I wouldn’t use the word beautiful. Not with you standing here in comparison.”

“You said the same thing to me that first night,” she said softly, smiling up at me in the moonlight.

“I remember. It was true then and it’s still true now.”

“I want to dance,” she said.

I led her by the hand to an area near the palms where the sand was more smooth and level. I slid my arm around her waist, grasped her other hand in mine and pulled her up onto my feet. She laughed as we started to sway together. She laid her head against my chest and my cheek rested

against her hair.

"Do you remember the last time we danced?" I asked.

I heard a muffled chuckle against my skin. "Some things about that night are a little fuzzy."

"You were humming the song from our wedding reception, the one we first danced to."

"Oh God. How bad was it?"

"Pretty bad."

"Hum it for me now," she said.

I held her warm body tightly against mine, and as we moved slowly together, I hummed the song in her ear. After awhile, she let go of my hand and clasped both of her hands behind my neck. Our eyes met and held in the darkness. I kissed her forehead and then let my lips stray slowly down her face until they found hers. Our kisses were lingering with fleeting touches of tongues. I closed my eyes and let my hands roam over her body. I never tired of feeling the feminine curve of her back as my hands moved across it, or the soft swell of her hips as they brushed against mine.

"Edward," she said abruptly. "I want to talk to you about something."

"Of course, anything," I answered. "Do you want me to fix a place for you to sit down?"

"No," she answered, smiling. "I like it the way we are."

I returned her smile and kissed her lightly on the lips. "What do you want to talk about?"

She hesitated for a moment, as if searching for the right words. Then her eyes lifted to mine. "I wanted to talk about...—" She stopped, but then seemed to gain enough confidence to continue. "—I wanted to talk about when you change me and what it's going to be like."

I stroked her hair tenderly. "Love, we have plenty of time before that happens. There's no need for you to worry about that now."

"Oh, I'm not worried," she said. "I've just been thinking about it and wondering how you're going to do it."

"I haven't really given that part of it much thought," I mused. In actuality, the only part I'd given any serious consideration to was afterward. I knew firsthand how painful the whole process was going to be for her. I hated the thought of her enduring that kind of pain just to be with me forever.

"Well, I have," she said. "And if you think about it, that one event is going to be just as important as our wedding. We should plan how we want everything to happen, just like we did with our marriage ceremony."

"Why do I get the feeling that you've already got it all planned out?" I asked, smiling down at her.

She laughed quietly. "Because I do."

"Tell me."

“Well, I’m not sure where it’s going to happen. That part is a little fuzzy at the moment. But I know exactly what I want to happen,” she said. “Since I won’t be eating human food anymore, I want you to cook a meal for me, my last meal. It doesn’t matter what it is, just as long as it’s prepared by your hands. I want to eat it on a table set with beautiful dishes, candles, and flowers, with soft music playing in the background. I’ll be wearing some incredibly sexy dress that Alice picked out for me.”

“Sounds very romantic,” I said softly.

“And then, I want to dance with you. Since I’ll be perfectly coordinated like you afterward, I thought you should have one last dance with Clumsy Bella.” She chuckled softly and I laughed along with her. But I had to admit that I was going to miss her clumsiness immensely. It was part of what made her so endearing.

She lifted her eyes to mine. When she spoke next, the emotion in her voice sent chills down my body. “And then, I want you to make love to me one last time as a human. I want you to spend our last hours together enjoying the scent of me, the taste of my skin, and all the other things that you love about me right now.”

As she spoke these words to me, her eyes never wavered from mine. My breathing quickened as she continued. My body stirred to the images her words formed in my mind.

“I want to feel you inside of me—that coolness that belongs only to you—one last time,” she whispered seductively. Her lips brushed mine lightly. “I want it to be slow and gentle. I want it to last as long as possible.”

A soft moan inadvertently escaped my lips as hers hovered just out of reach. Her warm breath drifted over my face with each whispered word. The scent of her breath, her skin, her hair was intoxicating like never before.

“And when we can’t hold back the end any longer, when the pleasure finally overtakes us, I want you to bite me...right here.” She pushed the hair back off of her shoulder, exposing her neck in the moonlight. She ran her fingers lightly down her neck. My eyes followed their progress. “Here,” she whispered, so, so softly. “And I want you to taste me one last time. I want you to drink, and drink, and drink from me until the venom pours into your mouth.”

I heard a low, soft growl followed by a harsh intake of breath, and was shocked to realize it had come from me. My body was hard and aching for her with an intensity that stunned me.

“And then, while the pleasure is rushing through us both, I want you to let the venom flow into the wound.” She brushed her lips lightly over mine, and held them in place as she continued. “The last thing I want to hear as a human being are the sounds of your pleasure all around me. I want you to prolong it for yourself as long as possible while you fill me with the venom that’s going to make me like you.”

“Bella,” I gasped harshly. I pulled her mouth roughly to mine and kissed her hard, my tongue probing deep into her mouth. I kissed my way across her jaw until I reached her neck, and hardened even more as I grazed my teeth down her skin. “I can do it right now,” I murmured against her skin. “Let me turn you tonight.” The hands that now held her face between them were trembling. “Please,” I begged.

“Oh, Edward,” she crooned softly. She kissed me tenderly and stroked my hair. “We can’t. It’s not the right time or place.”

I groaned in frustration. Of course she was right. This wasn't the time or the place. I wanted Carlisle nearby as back up in case something happened to her. And taking a newborn home on an airliner would be an incredibly stupid thing to do. What was I thinking? I set about bringing some reason back into my body and my mind.

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to make things harder for you," she said.

"Don't be absurd, love." I chuckled breathlessly. "You just made it sound so good."

"So, I take it you like my idea?" she asked, grinning.

"It's perfect," I answered. "For us, it's absolutely perfect, and that's exactly how it's going to happen."

We held each other close and swayed to nonexistent music, our feet shuffling in the loose sand. When our mouths found each other's again, all of the urgency from before had faded, but the fire was still smoldering inside of me.

"Make love to me," she said urgently. "Here, on the beach, under the moon and the stars."

I kissed her tenderly, smiled and then released her. I moved at vampire speed, pulling palm fronds from nearby trees. In seconds, a soft bed of green lay spread out in the sand. I stripped off my boxers and dropped them aimlessly on the ground. I couldn't take my eyes off of her as she slowly pulled the dress up over her head and off of her body. She tossed her hair out of her eyes as I took the dress from her hands. I spread it across the palms to help protect her fragile skin from any roughness of the leaves.

She sat down on our "bed" and brushed the sand off of her feet. She stretched out and offered her body to me completely, her eyes watching my every move, her heart, her breathing, everything about her humming with anticipation. I stretched out beside of her and pulled her close, burying my face in her hair and neck and breathing the perfume of her human scent deep into my lungs. Like last night, its intensity was a shock to my senses.

"You smell so good," I whispered roughly against her ear as I continued to breathe deeply. She sighed and ran her fingers lazily through my hair as I kissed her neck and grazed my lips along her jaw.

I spent an eternity just kissing her and teasing her with a flick of my tongue or a soft nibble at her lip. I moved slowly down her body, my lips touching, caressing and lingering over every inch of her. I would never be able to touch her enough even though I would soon have an eternity to try. The feel of her skin, the smell and taste of it would linger on in my memory long after all humanity had left her.

"Edward." She moaned softly, tugging at my hair. I raised my head and moved back up until our faces were inches apart. "I don't want either one of us to ever forget this time we've had together."

I smiled and stroked her hair. "My lips could never forget the softness of yours, my tongue—the taste of your skin, my lungs—the smell of your body. And every time I close my eyes, my mind will remember every image of you, every sensation that we ever experienced together, every word that's ever been spoken between us. I'll never forget any of it, Bella, and I won't let you forget either."

A tear slipped out of one of her eyes and slid down the side of her face. I smiled and wiped it away with a brush of my finger. "Happy tears?" I asked softly.

She nodded.

I tenderly stroked her cheek with my thumb and the backs of my fingers. "Your skin is luminescent tonight," I murmured. "There's a glow to you that's so appealing."

She chuckled softly and then sniffed. "It's the moon."

"No, not the moon. It's you. You're more beautiful tonight than I've ever seen you, and I want you more than I ever have."

I shifted my body so that I hovered over her. She opened herself to me and I slid slowly inside of her. A deep satisfied moan slid out of my throat, like it did every single time our bodies merged.

She gasped softly. "I love that sound. You sound so contented."

"That's because I've found where I belong, finally," I said.

Like the ocean behind us, with its constant rush at the land, I pushed inside of her, deep, slow and steady. And as our bodies moved together, I spoke to her in hushed whispers, and shared all of the thoughts and feelings I'd kept inside.

"You'll never know what these past weeks have meant to me, especially the past seven days," I whispered. "I've never been happier, never felt so normal, so free of all the constraints of my existence."

I continued my slow, deep, steady rhythm without pause. I moaned at the feel of her body, hot and clinging, smooth as silk. Her eyes followed mine and watched my every movement. Her breaths came rhythmically; small sighs of pleasure escaped her slightly parted lips, sighs that matched each of my slow strokes. She never spoke, but instead watched and listened and moved her hands lightly over my face, shoulders and back. Her fingers occasionally rifled through my hair.

"I never knew it was possible to completely lose yourself in someone else," I whispered huskily as I steadily pushed us closer and closer.

Her fingers scraped along my biceps. Her moans soon became deeper, her breathing heavier. I fought the urge to speed up, but instead kept to my slow and grinding pace. Lust shot through my body and into hers as I pushed even deeper and harder into her with an intensity that brought low and desperate whimpers from her throat.

"Edward," she gasped, her heart pounding against my chest. "Oh God. This is different. Something's different."

I felt it, too. Instead of that sudden clenching of the muscles inside of her that always signaled the beginnings of her orgasms, there was an intense heat and tightness that had been there from the moment I'd entered her. And now, I felt it building, strong and deep inside of her where I'd never felt it before.

She clawed at my chest, scraped her nails down my hard skin and whimpered between clenched teeth, her panting becoming increasingly more ragged with each stroke of my body. She closed her eyes and hoarse groans came from deep inside her. I cursed as I tried not to give in to the sheer intensity of it, the burning heat surrounding me, the tight grip of her body around mine. I drove

into her as deep as I could go, hard and insistent, steady and slow.

“Don’t stop what you’re doing!” She groaned, whimpered and writhed underneath me.

My fingers clawed uselessly into the sand as I searched for something to hold on to. The already tiny grains of crystal turned to fine powder in my clutching fingers. The leaves of the palms were shredded to bits. Her body tensed and the heat inside of her intensified astronomically. It had never felt like this before and we were both pushing our bodies with every ounce of strength we possessed to reach the end.

It started deep, a tightening and shuddering that grew until it finally exploded around me. It spread like wildfire and completely consumed both of us, catapulting me over the edge with her. Our screams echoed in the night air—hers high-pitched and breathless—mine loud and ragged and low. The pleasure was so intense, so all-encompassing that it left us shocked and silent when it was all over. Neither one of us spoke for the longest time. We simply lay beside each other in stunned astonishment and luxuriated in whatever the hell it was that had just happened.

“What was that??” she asked when our bodies had completely quieted.

I looked up at the night sky and wondered how to answer her. I had absolutely no idea. All I knew for sure was that we had connected tonight in a way, and with a depth, in which we had never connected before. “I have no idea. But whatever it was, I hope it wasn’t a one-time thing.”

I sensed a smile on her face without even looking. “Me, too,” she answered.

“By the way—“ I said quietly, as I gathered her up into my arms and gazed into those deep brown eyes. “I loved what you said to me, right before...”

She looked at me with a puzzled frown. “What? I didn’t say anything, did I?”

I smiled. “Yes, you did. You said ‘It doesn’t get any fucking better than this’ just before everything exploded.”

I expected at least a small blush to spread over her face, but she just stared back at me, strangely silent. Her brows were pulled together in a deep frown. “I didn’t say that,” she said quietly.

“Yes you did. I heard it as plain as day,” I said with a laugh. “Don’t be embarrassed, love. It’s incredibly sexy and naughty when you curse.”

She shook her head, ignoring my teasing. “Edward, you don’t understand. I didn’t say that out loud. I *thought* it.”

The universe suddenly shrank until it contained only me and her and those three small words: I thought it.

“You heard my thoughts,” she gasped softly.

If I’d had a beating heart, it would have stopped dead at that very moment. If I’d had any life-giving breath left in my lungs, it would have rushed out with the force of the shock. I opened my mouth to say something, but it just hung there in stunned disbelief. My mind was racing with the possibilities, and a thousand questions at the same time, as I struggled to speak.

“What just happened?” I whispered urgently, even though I knew she couldn’t explain it any more

than I could.

“There’s only one explanation.” Her eyes shone with happiness and a deep, fathomless love. I waited expectantly for her to continue. “Two souls became one, just for an instant,” she whispered softly. “Just long enough.”

I pulled her roughly to me, kissed her deeply, and then buried my face in her hair. I held onto her with all the love I had in me, and I refused to let go. If I could have cried, the tears would have been streaming down my face unabated. This was what I had wanted more than anything else: to be able to share her thoughts with her, to really know her mind and experience the essence of who she was that mere words could never express.

But in the end, there was nothing else to be said. No amount of talking or reasoning would ever fully explain what happened to us tonight. Some things just had to be taken on faith; I’d learned that from Bella. If it happened once, it could happen again. I prayed with every bit of mental strength I possessed that it would.

Two souls became one.

Just for an instant.

Just long enough.

The Fairy Tale

It was late morning by the time Bella finished her breakfast and the kitchen was clean. We had discussed plans for the afternoon as she scarfed down her omelet, and mutually decided to spend the day indoors just relaxing. I suggested we read a book together and she eagerly agreed. We sprawled on the bed, our heads propped up on big, fluffy pillows, and our legs intertwined. Not long into the first chapter, Bella started fidgeting.

She sighed. "I'm just not in the mood to read. You go on without me."

She scooted off the bed and disappeared down the hall. She reappeared after a few moments with a handful of clothes. She made her rounds of our bedroom, picking things off the floor as she went. I glanced up and watched her for a few moments.

"What are you doing?" I asked curiously.

"I'm just tidying up a little bit," she answered, smiling as she continued to add to the ever-growing pile in her arms.

"Do we have company coming or something?" A wadded up shirt sailed through the air and landed on my head.

I pitched it back at her and chuckled when she caught it in mid air and walked back up the hall. When she didn't return after a few minutes, I gave up on reading and went to investigate. I found her in the den dusting the furniture.

"We have a cleaning crew for that, love."

"I know. I just can't seem to sit still this morning. I have all this nervous energy. I'm fine, Edward. Just let me putter around for awhile, okay?"

I kissed her on the forehead and watched in amusement as she straightened the DVDs, adjusted a lamp shade, plumped the pillows on the sofa, and moved things around on the coffee table for no apparent reason. She lifted and straightened the scatter rugs, which had looked perfectly fine to me before she bothered them. Something was evidently wrong with the drapes, as she spent quite a bit of time smoothing the folds in them. Apparently satisfied, she left the den and went up the hall. I followed her into the kitchen and watched her attack the counters and table with a dish towel.

"I already did that this morning," I reminded her.

"Well," she said with a flip of her towel. "A kitchen can never be too clean."

I frowned in amused confusion as she breezed out of the room with a broom and headed down the hall to our bedroom. I leaned against the door frame and watched her sweep furiously.

"Sand," she stated, before I could ask what she was doing.

"Bella, love!" I exclaimed.

"I'm fine, really." She smiled as she pushed her hair back behind her ears. She leaned the broom against the wall and picked up an armful of scatter rugs and headed out the French doors with

them. I heard the repeated snapping of the rugs as she wrested every minute grain of sand from them.

I sighed and stretched out on the bed again with my book, trying to appear unconcerned about this sudden burst of energy from someone who had seemed to be perpetually tired recently. I watched out of the corner of my eye as she placed the rugs back in place and stood with her hands on her hips surveying the room. She pulled and tugged on the comforter I was lying on until it conformed to some perfect alignment that existed only in her mind. She straightened another lampshade and then headed out of the room. She returned a while later with a bucket of water and a scrub brush. She went into the bathroom and proceeded to get down on her hands and knees and start scrubbing the floor.

“Woah!” I exclaimed, tossing down my book and hurrying to her side. I gently grabbed her hand and pulled the brush from her grasp. “No, love. This is where I draw the line. You’re *not* scrubbing this floor on your hands and knees like a medieval scullery maid. We have a cleaning crew for this.” I gently pulled her up and wrapped my arms around her waist. “What’s with you today?”

“I’m just so full of energy.” She shrugged. “I don’t know what it is.”

“Well, let’s do something fun with that energy, something better than scrubbing tile,” I suggested. “How about a swim? Or a long walk on the beach? Or maybe we could walk down to the cliffs and do some more cliff diving?”

She lifted those molten brown eyes to mine, immediately arousing my lust. That one brush of her eyes across mine, and the slight parting of her lips were like setting a lighted match to a fuse. Every nerve ending in my body caught fire, and I instantly hardened at the promise those eyes held.

“I have a better idea,” she said softly. We kissed and sighed in unison as our tongues touched fleetingly.

“Didn’t we just do this a few hours ago?” I murmured in between her nibbling at my lip. I’d made love to her on the beach just after sunrise with the heat of her body underneath me and the morning sun bathing my back in warmth. It had been a most satisfying way to start the day. Almost better than a shower.

“Are you saying you’re not up to it?” She grinned seductively as her hand slid slowly down my stomach.

“I’m always up to it.” I chuckled lowly and then moaned in her hair as she gripped me firmly through my underwear. I lifted her t-shirt over her head; she dribbled off her shorts and panties. I deep kissed her as she attempted to maneuver my boxers over my erection.

“Help.” She giggled breathlessly against my mouth after she had fumbled with my underwear for an interminably long time. I chuckled at her awkwardness, and deftly pulled them off in a matter of seconds and dropped them aimlessly to the floor.

She led me to the bed with her. She stretched out, parted her legs just enough to give me a glimpse of what lay between them and then beckoned for me. I braced myself between her thighs. Her hands moved over my skin, touching every place possible, as I kissed her face, her neck, her collarbones and finally her breasts. I cupped them in my hands and gently sucked her nipples until they hardened in my mouth. I kneaded her mounds with my fingers, alternately nibbling and

sucking them. Her soft whimpers of pleasure only urged me on, until she finally fisted her hands in my hair and pulled my lips back to hers.

She arched her hips up to mine and begged me softly to take her. I smiled at her impatience. I loved it when she pleaded with me. I loved the huskiness in her voice as she told me what she wanted. I loved the urgency in her body as she rubbed it against mine. Mostly, I just loved going slow. The slower, the better.

I kissed my way down her stomach, light, feathery kisses that barely touched her skin. My fingertips followed close behind, lightly brushing across that same skin. Chill bumps rose in their wake. As I moved lower, she moaned in anticipation and pushed her hips upward.

I loved the human smell of her skin, the heady female scent of her body, and the luscious taste of it on my tongue. The rush of blood in her thighs thrummed through my head as my mouth moved lazily between her legs: slow brushes of my tongue, soft sensual kisses, and gentle sucking. Her fingers clutched at my hair as she pushed her hips urgently against my mouth. *My Bella, so impatient.* I raised my head and kissed my way back up her body. She moaned in frustration, pushing her hips hard against mine and writhing underneath my hands. We were both aching for each other, but I wasn't ready for it to be over.

I nudged gently on her body. "Roll over on your stomach," I whispered hoarsely. She did as I asked without question. I pushed her hair away from her neck and started at her hairline, kissing my way down her neck, her back, and across to her sides, which made her squirm and softly giggle.

I worked my way slowly downward, until I reached her soft, rounded bottom. I trailed light kisses over their softness and then continued without stopping down the backs of her silky thighs. She wiggled her bottom seductively and groaned as I worked my way back up. My tongue teased her everywhere but where she wanted it. She arched her back, exposing the warm place that ached for my tongue. I slid my hand between her legs instead, slowly and gently brushing forward and back, my fingers lightly touching her warmth and quickly moving on.

I moaned softly as I watched her clutch the comforter in pleasure. Fistfuls of cotton bunched in her hands as her entire body writhed against my fingers. Her soft whimpers filled the room. I pulled my hand away. She growled my name in frustration and attempted to turn over. I stopped her, and covered the back of her body with mine and whispered my intentions in her ear. A lovely vulgarity slid from her lips in answer.

She propped herself on both of her forearms, raising her chest up off the bed. I snaked one arm underneath her and across her chest. Her breast fit perfectly in my hand. I rested my body weight on my other forearm, and I pushed slowly into her. A long, low moan erupted from my throat. I never could hold in the pleasure that that first contact with her body always gave me. A deep groan from her told me she felt the same way. I moved inside her with long, slow strokes. The feel of her in this position was different, and the softness of her bottom brushing my groin with each push was incredibly erotic. I kneaded her breast and gently squeezed her nipple in concert with each slow thrust.

Her hand moved a few inches on the mattress until it was beside mine. Our fingers entwined. We gripped each other's hands as we got closer to the end. I was moaning now with each stroke, and slowly losing my grip on reality. She began to arch her back against each of my thrusts, pushing her soft bottom hard against my hips and taking me deeper inside of her.

Her hand began to tighten in mine. Her fingers squeezing as the pleasure intensified. She was

panting softly in rhythm with my movements. I buried my face in her hair next to her ear, and whispered to her, urging her on. She told me what she wanted, using language she would never have dreamed of using in ordinary circumstances. It only served to push me completely over the edge. I let go of her hand and her breast, and gripped her hips in both my hands. I drove into her hard with the last few deep strokes, bringing forth orgasms that had us both screaming with the intensity of them.

I collapsed partially on top of her and partially on the bed. She was gasping for air as we waited for our bodies to return to normal. She rolled over and lay facing me. Her brown eyes were still glazed over; her warm breath washed over my face as she panted softly. Her heart thundered in her chest and then finally began to slow. The workings of her body never failed to fascinate me.

I had no heart to thunder in my chest, no need to calm any frantic breathing. What I did have was an acute awareness of every nerve ending in my body. And every single one had been touched by the pleasure of her, bathed in wave after wave of raw sensation. What I was waiting for was not a pounding in my chest to finally slow, but for the nerves in my body to finally calm and stop their tingling pulses. Tiny jolts of pleasure still shot through me long after my orgasm was gone. I had no doubt that vampires experienced sex much more intensely than humans did. I found myself pondering what it would be like between us when she was finally like me.

She sighed in contentment and traced a finger softly down my cheek.

“Still energetic?” I asked.

“I feel like a wet spaghetti noodle,” she said. “I couldn’t stand up if I wanted to.”

“You and the food analogies.” I chuckled. “Speaking of which, I need to hunt tonight. I’m overdue, but I’ll wait until you fall asleep for the night, all right?”

“Okay,” she murmured. We lay quietly for a while until she suddenly broke the silence. “I feel like I’m living a fairy tale.”

I laughed. “If you are, it’s the most bizarre fairy tale ever written.”

She rolled over and propped herself up on my chest, frowning. “No, its not. Instead of girl meets boy, its just girl meets vampire.”

“Yeah, but vampire wants to eat girl,” I said, snickering.

“But girl falls in love with vampire,” she argued.

“And vampire falls in love with girl. But vampire still wants to eat girl.” I smirked and she chuckled along with me.

“Then girl gets attacked by bad vampire,” she said.

“Good vampire saves girl.” I fingered a strand of her hair and stroked her cheek.

“Girl is happy,” she said, smiling.

“Vampire leaves girl.” I sighed with regret.

“Girl dies inside,” she whispered, her brown eyes filled with sadness.

“Vampire does, too.”

She giggled. “Then girl meets werewolf!”

“Can’t we leave that chapter out?” I whined.

“No, werewolf is sweet,” she admonished.

I growled. “Werewolf showed girl how to jump off cliffs.”

She stroked a finger down the bridge of my nose. “Girl missed vampire terribly.”

“Vampire thought girl was dead,” I murmured softly. “He tried to end it all.”

“Girl saved vampire,” she said, smiling.

“And vampire saved girl,” I added. “They saved each other.”

“Girl is happy...*again*,” she said with a giggle.

“Vampire isn’t. Werewolf won’t go away,” I said, frowning.

“Girl thinks werewolf is kinda cute,” she teased.

“Vampire thinks werewolf is massively annoying,” I snarled softly.

“Girl is confused. Which should she choose?” she mused, her eyes rolling toward the ceiling.

“Vampire and werewolf compete for girl. Vampire wins. End of story,” I stated with finality.

She grinned. “Nooo, you forgot something. Girl gets attacked by bad vampire...*again!*”

I sighed dramatically. “And good vampire has to save her butt...*again.*”

Girl is happy...*again.*” she said, snickering.

“Vampire proposes to girl.”

“Girl accepts, and they get married.” She smiled warmly.

I traced my finger lightly down her neck and slowly across her shoulder and down her arm.

“Vampire wants girl, really, really bad.” Our eyes met and held.

She shivered as chill bumps rose on her skin. “Girl thinks vampire is incredibly sexy,” she whispered seductively.

“Vampire makes love to girl and it’s like nothing he’s ever experienced before.”

“Girl too,” she said.

The sound of our kisses filled the room. She chuckled when our lips finally parted. “Girl thinks life with vampire is never going to be boring.”

“Vampire thinks life with girl is going to drive him crazy,” I said, nuzzling my face in her hair. “Especially since girl is stubborn as hell. But she’s beautiful, and smells really, really, good. Bella,” I moaned as I breathed her scent deep into my lungs. “Have I mentioned today how mouthwatering you smell?”

“Only two or three times.” She giggled as I buried my nose deeper into her hair. “So vampire still wants to eat girl?” she asked, grinning.

“Vampire always wants to eat girl,” I answered. “But he decides he wants to love her more than he wants to eat her.”

“Awww,” she said, ruffling my hair. “See? Now doesn’t that sound just like every other fairy tale you’ve ever read?”

“Yeah, right.” I rolled my eyes, snaking my hand into the back of her hair onto her neck, pulling her closer. “I love you, Bella. I know I say it all the time, but I mean it. I love you and I can’t wait to start our life together.”

“I love you, too,” she said. “And we’ve already started it, Edward. That day in the school cafeteria—the day our eyes first met across the room—that moment was the beginning of our life together.”

We snuggled close and talked for awhile until her comments got further and further apart. She finally drifted off to sleep tucked up safely in the crook of my arm. I’d thought she would only nap for an hour or two, but as midnight neared, she was still deeply asleep. I gently eased out from under her and arranged her limbs as comfortably as possible. I grabbed a piece of paper out of the bedside table and wrote her a note in case she woke up while I was gone:

I’m hoping you won’t wake and notice my absence, but, if you should, I’ll be back very soon. I’ve just gone to the mainland to hunt...remember? Go back to sleep and I’ll be here when you wake again. I love you.

I folded it in half and laid it on my pillow. I quickly got dressed and headed out of the house. As I moved through the low undergrowth toward the dock and the boat, I glanced one last time over my shoulder. The house was dark, my love sleeping safely inside.

Girl dreams of vampire when he’s gone.

Pregnancy

When I returned from hunting, the house was ablaze with light. Even from the dock, I heard the rock music blaring. Concerned, I jogged quickly through the French doors and stopped, surveying the bedroom. The bed was empty. I peeked into the bathroom on the way out. Nothing. I glanced in the den as I moved down the hall. Also empty. I rushed the rest of the way down the hall to the kitchen, and there she was. I smiled and leaned against the door to watch her. Her back was to me. She was swaying to the rhythm of the music, spatula in hand. A skillet of something was frying on the stove, the smell of it filling the room and the house. I reached over by the light switch and turned off the sound system. She glanced over her shoulder in surprise and yelped.

“Oh, my god!” she exclaimed, laughing. “You scared me to death! You shouldn’t sneak up on somebody like that!”

“Bella, love, the music was so loud, a raging bull could have snuck up on you and you wouldn’t have heard it.” I walked over and stood behind her, snaking my arms around her waist and burying my face in her hair. “What are you doing awake? You’re supposed to be asleep and dreaming of me.”

She laughed quietly as I pushed her hair aside and kissed her neck. “I woke up and you were gone. I was hungry, so I decided to fry some chicken.” She turned around in my arms until we were facing each other against the counter. “How was hunting?”

“Good. I’m very satisfied. Well, almost.” Her face was spotted with flour and she looked absolutely adorable. “You have some flour right here,” I said, brushing it off the bridge of her nose. “And, right here,” I said softly, lightly brushing a big spot off of her cheek. “And here,” I whispered as my finger brushed along her lips. I tugged on her chin until our lips met. Her mouth was soft and warm, and so inviting as it moved lazily over mine. I was flushed from feeding and enjoying the feel of her body against mine.

“The chicken’s going to burn.” She wiggled out of my arms and headed back to the stove.

I sighed in frustration and sat down at the table to wait for her to finish. I thought about going for a swim, or walking on the beach—anything to get away from the smell that was seeping into everything in the house—but I couldn’t pull my eyes away from her long enough to leave. Finally, she sat down across from me with a plate full of freshly fried chicken. I tried to keep my feelings of distaste from my face, but failed miserably.

“I take it you don’t like chicken,” she said, as she bit into a piece.

“It smells horrible and looks even worse.”

“You eat what you like, and I’ll eat what I like.”

It was an improvement over the peanut butter and jelly and black olives, but not much of one. I watched in morbid fascination as she ate every piece, gnawing at each bone to get every bit of meat from it she could. I wondered for a minute if she was going to eat the bones as well. Thankfully she didn’t. When she was finished, she leaned her head against her hand and smiled. Full and content, her eyelids began to droop. I hurriedly cleaned up the kitchen, and just in the short time it took to clean, dry and put everything away, she’d laid her head down on her outstretched arm and was dozing.

“Bella,” I whispered in her ear. She roused briefly, her brown eyes full of sleep. “Let’s get you to bed.” I scooped her up in my arms, turned off the lights on my way out, and carried her to our room. I deposited her gently on her side, and then went to turn off the lights in the rest of the house. When I returned, she was already in a deep sleep. I pulled her close, enveloping her in my arms. She sighed and wiggled against me, and then drifted off again.

While she slept, I daydreamed of Dartmouth and our future. I pictured us living together in our new home, me cooking her meals, laughing, studying, and probably arguing some, as well. Taking long walks through the autumn leaves and enjoying the snow in winter. I was looking forward to it all—the good and the bad. With her in my arms, I felt ready for anything this life could throw at me. This bizarre fairy tale was going to have a happy ending after all.

The sun was approaching its highest point in the sky when she finally opened her eyes to the day.

“Good morning,” I murmured in her hair. I already knew better than to try and kiss her first thing in the morning, so I pecked her tenderly on the side of her cheek.

She frowned and then grimaced. “Morning.”

“What would you like for breakfast?”

“Excuse me,” she gasped, clapping a hand over her mouth, scooting off the bed and streaking into the bathroom.

I was right behind her, holding her hair away from her face as she knelt on the floor and vomited into the toilet. When the retching finally ceased, I pressed my hand against her forehead and then her cheeks, and finally the back of her neck. She moaned and collapsed back against me.

“What’s wrong?” I asked anxiously.

“Damned rancid chicken.”

“Are you all right now?”

“Fine,” she answered shakily. “It’s just food poisoning. I thought the chicken might have tasted a little off at first, but I ate it anyway. Stupid me.”

We sat in the floor for awhile before I suggested she go back and lie down. She insisted on walking with only my hand at her elbow to help her along.

“How do you feel now?” I asked after she’d lain down for several minutes.

“Pretty normal,” she answered. “Actually, I’m hungry.” She smiled up at me, and all the worry I’d felt melted away.

“Let’s wait a little while longer just to make sure, then I’ll fix you something.”

We snuggled on the bed and talked about what we might do with the rest of the day. After an hour had passed with no further nausea, I felt like she could probably eat something light. I fried a couple of eggs for her. She gushed over how good they tasted and completely cleaned her plate.

“I think I’m going to take a bath this morning. I don’t feel like standing in the shower. I’m so tired.”

“I’ll run the water for you.” I held her hand as we walked down the hall to the bedroom. Suddenly, she clutched at her stomach and took off at a sprint toward the bathroom. Once again, I held her hair away from her face as she vomited up her entire breakfast.

“Maybe we should go back to Rio and see a doctor,” I suggested as she was rinsing her mouth afterward.

“I’ll be fine. Just let me brush my teeth and maybe take some medicine. I might have some Pepto-Bismol in my suitcase.”

“I’ll go look for it for you.”

“No, Edward. I’m fine, really. Why don’t you go pick out a movie for us to watch while I look?”

“You’re sure you’re all right?” I asked skeptically.

“Yes,” she growled, smiling. “Go find us a mushy love story.”

I reluctantly left her side and went into the den. I glanced quickly through the DVDs, looking for the sappiest romance film I could find. I considered and discarded quite a few before finally settling on one. I got the movie ready and plumped the pillows on the sofa in preparation.

I went back to our bedroom in search of her and found her sitting immobile on the floor next to her suitcase with a small box in her hand. Her face was ashen. In an instant I was by her side on the floor, my cool hand resting on her forehead. “Bella, are you well?” I asked anxiously.

“Yes and...no,” she said in a hoarse whisper.

“What’s wrong?” For the first time, I looked closely at the box she was holding in her hand: tampons.

“How many days has it been since the wedding?” she asked.

“Seventeen,” I answered automatically. We looked at each other and the realization came to us both at the same time.

“Edward, I’m five days late. I’m never late.”

I was so in tune with the workings of her body. I always knew exactly to the day when her menstrual cycle would begin and end, and I’d forgotten. *How could you have forgotten? Why haven’t you been paying attention?? You should have been paying attention!* My body went still of its own accord. My mind slowed until it seemed everything was happening in slow motion. I was dimly aware of Bella jumping up and leaving my side, but I didn’t give a damn enough to move or ask why. I knew I should be thinking, analyzing, trying to figure how the fuck this could have happened, but my mind wasn’t working properly. My thoughts were sluggish, my reasoning

abilities frozen. My brain suddenly felt like a lump of inert and useless tissue. I was numb. My mind was numb. My body felt numb. This must be what it feels like to be in shock.

“Impossible.” Her soft whisper filtered through the mush that was my brain at the moment. I latched onto that one word like a lifeline and focused on it.

Impossible. Of course it's impossible! This...is...impossible. Period. Is this fucking possible? This can't be possible. I kept repeating these same words over and over in my head, but an answer was beyond me. An explanation was out of my reach. It was like my brain was a scratched record, playing the same lines over and over and over and over.

Ring! Ring! Ring! The sound of my phone ringing in my pocket broke through the fog. It probably had been vibrating for quite some time. I hadn't noticed. I didn't care. I held onto the one phrase I wanted to believe, the only thing my brain could accept: *this isn't possible*. I repeated it over and over in my head. It became my mantra.

I vaguely felt Bella's hands patting and then digging in my pocket. Her touch, her hot breath on my face jump-started my brain. I began to gradually focus on my surroundings, albeit very, very slowly. The mantra continued to drone, whisper soft, in the background of my mind.

“Hi, Alice,” Bella said, clearing her throat. I listened passively to the one-sided conversation taking place beside me. That is, the words filtered into my head, but their meaning didn't clearly register. All I knew for sure was she was talking to Alice and then someone else. Probably Carlisle. They were talking about me. *Who the fuck cares about me?? Bella's should be worrying about herself!* That was so like her.

“I think, well, I think that maybe...I might be...” Short pause.

Don't say it Bella. Don't say it and maybe it won't be true.

“Pregnant.”

A shock wave burned through my body as I heard it, as I heard the word finally spoken aloud. The word my brain had been fighting desperately against.

Long pause.

“Sixteen days before the wedding,” she answered. Short pause. “Weird. This is going to sound crazy, but I've been eating like a horse, crying, throwing up, tired and sleeping a lot. And I swear something moved inside me just now.”

That did it. That snapped me out of my shock like a dash of ice water to the face. I silently held my hand out for the phone. She handed it to me without comment. It was Carlisle. “*Son, are you all right?*” Carlisle asked with concern.

I ignored his question. Bella had just felt something move inside of her. Of course, I wasn't all right. I was on the verge of fucking losing it. “Is it possible?” I whispered.

“I really don't know for sure, but according to her symptoms, that seems to be the logical answer. If she's sure about the dates, I don't see how it could be anything else. I've never heard of anything like this happening. You know I would have warned you if I'd had any earthly idea it was possible.”

“And Bella?” I asked, wrapping my arm around her and pulling her gently to my side.

“I’m not going to lie to you. This could be dangerous for her, maybe even fatal. We have no way of knowing how her body is going to respond or even if she will be able to carry this child. If she’s already feeling movement, things are already progressing much too quickly. If you’re thinking of terminating the pregnancy, we need to do it as soon as possible. You must get her back to Forks as soon as possible,” he said urgently. “Take care of her. I know you will, but be especially careful now...” His voice trailed off to a whisper.

“Yes. Yes, I will,” I answered shortly and then ended the call.

“What did Carlisle say?” she asked expectantly.

“He thinks you’re pregnant,” I answered.

The realization finally hit me with its full force as my mouth formed the word. Pregnant. Something ignited deep inside of me, a tiny flame of slow burning rage—small, but hot, and growing hotter by the minute. I dialed a number and brought the phone back to my ear.

“Who are you calling?” she asked.

“The airport. We’re going home. *Now.*”

I spent an hour on the phone with the airlines arguing in Portuguese with an incompetent human who insisted there was nothing available this evening. How the fuck could there not be two seats available? Who the hell flies red eye but fucking vampires?! And how many fucking vampires were there that needed to get their pregnant wife home as soon as possible?? There should be plenty of seats! I restrained my temper and fought back the rage simmering just below the surface. I argued relentlessly that there had to be something, *anything*. She tried to put us on a daylight flight even though I’d explained to her through gritted teeth that I wanted a night flight. She put me on hold before I could object.

I glanced over at Bella sitting passively on the bed, her eyes wide and watching my every move. “Get dressed. We’re leaving as soon as I can get a flight.”

I decided to use my time on hold to start packing. I rushed from room to room at vampire speed, picking things up, packing things away, pulling clothes out of drawers with one hand. I went into the kitchen with a carry-on and stuffed it with snacks for Bella. She followed me into the kitchen and was now standing beside the table crying.

I crossed the room in a flash. “Are you in pain?” I asked urgently. She shook her head; I pulled her against me. “Don’t be afraid. We’ll be home in sixteen hours. You’ll be fine. Carlisle will be ready when we get there. We’ll take care of this and you’ll be fine. You’ll be fine.”

The woman from the airline came back on and our argument started anew. I gestured impatiently at Bella, silently prodding her to go and get dressed, and all the while I was cursing in Portuguese and wishing I was within reach of this annoying woman’s neck.

“Put the phone down,” she said quietly. I ignored her. The woman sounded like she might be close to finding something. “Edward, put...the...phone...DOWN! “

The tone of her voice caught me by surprise. My eyes caught hers and I saw anger, a hot, burning anger that nearly matched my own. Without taking my eyes off of her, I disconnected the call and slid the phone back into my pocket.

“What did you mean, ‘We’ll take care of this’?” she asked in a low and quiet voice.

“Carlisle can help us. He’s qualified to do it.”

“Are you talking about an abortion?” she asked with a horrified expression.

“Of course.”

“I don’t believe in abortion,” she said emphatically.

“In a normal situation, I’d respect your beliefs, but this is not a normal situation, so your beliefs are irrelevant,” I answered. “It will be taken care of.”

Her eyes flamed with anger and shone with tears. Her hands flew to her stomach. “I won’t allow it! I won’t let you and Carlisle kill our child!”

The rage that had been simmering in me finally erupted. “This thing is not a child! It’s a monster! A freak of nature like me! It shouldn’t exist!”

“It is not a monster!” she screamed. “And you are not a monster or a freak! Don’t say that!”

I suddenly realized that we both were screaming at each other. I made a conscious effort to calm myself and lower my voice, but it shook with anger and disgust when I finally spoke.

“I am a monster, no matter how much you deny it, no matter how much I fight it. It’s still the truth of my existence,” I said, my voice shaking with barely controlled anger. “But I’m a monster with over a century of experiences and a certain level of maturity. I have a brain that can reason, that can make intelligent decisions. I have the ability to feel empathy, love, compassion!” I felt my voice rising as I continued. “That thing inside of you, that selfish creature doesn’t have that! It will do whatever it has to survive. It won’t care whether it kills you. All it will care about is growing and surviving. I know what it will do! That thing that’s in you lives deep inside of me! I deal with it every fucking day! I fight it every... single... moment... of every... single... day! I know what it’s capable of!”

“Stop calling it a thing! It’s a child! It came from me and you! A part of you is inside of me now! I want that and I won’t let you take it from me!” she screamed.

She was trembling; tears were streaming down her cheeks. We had to stop screaming at each other. This was not good for her. I clamped down on my anger and fought to keep my voice calmer. I barked a short, disgusted laugh.

“That part of me that you want so badly, it’s the worst part of me,” I said quietly. “It’s this monster, this blood lust in its purest form. It has no morals, no guilt, no conscience. Survival is all it cares about. It will kill you, never doubt that,” I whispered. “And I won’t let it, never doubt that either.”

We stared at each other across the room. Bella and I had once again found ourselves in a test of wills, only this time, I wasn’t backing down.

“You’re doing it again,” she said, glaring, her mouth a thin slash of anger across her face. “You’re taking control, like you try to take control in every situation that involves me. You’re making a decision that affects both of us, without even considering my feelings! You’re treating me like I’m two years old instead of a reasoning, mature adult with opinions of my own! I thought we’d moved past that, Edward!”

“When one person is making a stupid decision, the other one has to be the intelligent one and do the right thing!” I snapped.

“Edward. Anthony. Masen. Cullen.” She was fuming, her chest heaving with anger. Her hands were balled up into tight, angry fists, her voice low, quiet and ominous. “I’ve never felt violent toward you, but I want to hit you so badly right now I can taste it. If I didn’t think it’d break my arm, I’d ram my fist right into your face!”

The realization that she was totally sincere stopped me in my tracks and made me reevaluate the direction of this conversation. She couldn’t hurt me, of course, but the fact that she even wanted to sent a stab of pain directly into my heart. *Why are we doing this to each other?*

“Bella,” I said quietly. “Let’s just take a moment and calm down. Let’s just stop and think about this, all right?” I backed away from her and leaned against the counter, my eyes on the floor. What could I do to convince her that this was the only solution, that her life depended on making the right decision? Ending the pregnancy was the right decision. No question. My mind searched furiously for an answer while we both found our composure.

I finally looked up and met her eyes. “After Victoria, I made a vow to myself that nothing or no one would ever hurt you again. I made the same vow to myself on our wedding day, and I made it again the first night of our honeymoon, the first night we made love. I vowed to protect you and now it’s me that’s hurting you...*again*.”

She was silently shaking her head, denying what we both knew.

“Yes, it’s true. I never intend to hurt you, but I always manage it somehow. I’m so sorry. I know that doesn’t help, but nevertheless, I am truly sorry I’ve put you in this situation,” I whispered, my voice breaking unexpectedly.

“I won’t let you blame yourself for this. We both did this. Pregnancies don’t happen with just one person. Neither one of us could have foreseen this. But married people talk through their problems. They work it out. They reach a decision together, remember? We don’t need to be fighting with each other now; we need to hold on to each other,” she reasoned quietly, the anger gone.

“There is no other decision for me. I don’t want this...*thing*. I’m sorry if that hurts you, but I don’t want it in our lives,” I said deliberately and with quiet force. “Don’t you understand? I thought I lost you once. I can’t bear to go through that again. I can live without that.” I pointed at her stomach, then I found her eyes. “I can’t live without you. This time we’ve had together has been the happiest of my existence. I finally have a life that’s meaningful and rich and full, because you’re a part of it. I can’t lose that, not after waiting so long for it.”

Tears streamed down her face, she gulped them down and walked slowly over to me. “You’re afraid,” she whispered.

“Yes,” I whispered. “I’m afraid.”

“I am too. I’m not stupid. I know there’s going to be risk involved,” she said, sniffing. “I’m willing to take that risk to have your child.”

“Well, I’m not! I can’t!” I whispered harshly.

She collapsed into my arms and sobbed her heart out. I held her and murmured my love to her as her tears wet my shirt. My whole body mourned her pain. I felt so helpless because all I could do was hold her and tell her everything would be all right, even though I had no faith in my own words. She finally pulled away and gazed up at me. I saw resolve in her eyes, a newfound strength that she had discovered somewhere in her tears.

“Married couples compromise when they have something they can’t agree on,” she stated in a strong voice. She wiped the tears from her cheeks, sniffed and continued. “I’m willing to compromise, if you are.”

I was immediately suspicious. Compromise, by its very definition, meant giving up something you really wanted. I saw absolutely no room for deals in this situation. Nevertheless, my curiosity got the better of me. “What did you have in mind?” I asked suspiciously.

“I’m willing to listen to whatever Carlisle advises. If he thinks that the baby could cause me severe harm, then I’ll listen, with an open mind, to his recommendations,” she said quietly.

“You mean, if he recommended abortion, then you’d consider it?” I asked, astonished.

She nodded silently.

I narrowed my eyes suspiciously. “But you’ve already made up your mind that you don’t want to end this pregnancy.”

“No. I’ve already made up my mind that *you’re* not making up my mind for me,” she stated firmly. “That doesn’t mean that I can’t change my mind.”

I ran that convoluted logic through my own mind and searched for its meaning without success. “That’s Bella Logic.”

“That’s right.” She smiled, just a small smile, but a smile nonetheless. “When you’re not telling me what I’m going to do, I actually can be made to see reason. It’s when you start ordering me around that I dig in my heels. So, now it’s your turn to compromise,” she prompted.

Her brown eyes were searching mine, waiting expectantly for my answer. Trouble was, I didn’t see any room for a change in my decision. In my world, there was no place for offspring. Period. But, she’d made a huge concession, so I guessed I would have to make one, too. Compromises weren’t like promises, were they? No. They weren’t necessarily set in stone. They could change. That thought made it easier for me to say what she needed to hear.

“All right,” I started hesitantly. “I’m willing to listen to Carlisle’s advice also.” Then I stopped, hoping that would be enough to satisfy her. She was waiting impatiently for me to continue. I sighed. “If Carlisle thinks that the...if Carlisle thinks that you can —” I stopped again.

“Edward...” she urged me on.

“If Carlisle thinks that you can...safely...have the...thi-...the child...” The breath I’d been holding escaped my lungs in one long exhale. “Then I’ll...listen with an open mind to his

recommendations,” I finished in a rush.

Her arms crushed me in a tight embrace. I wrapped mine around her and hugged her tight, my face and hands buried deep in her hair.

“What are we going to do?” I whispered softly in anguish. The happy fairy tale was crashing down around us.

She pulled away just enough so she could look up at me. “Whatever we do, we’ll do it together. Promise me that. Don’t walk away from me, physically or emotionally. Promise me.”

“I promise,” I said softly, stroking her cheek. Where would I go? There was nowhere else for me.

She kissed me tenderly, and then slowly it turned into more. Her fingers entwined in my hair as the kiss deepened and our tongues touched fleetingly.

“No, love,” I said, pulling away from her.

“Please,” she whimpered. “I need to feel close to you right now. Please.”

“We need to leave,” I insisted. “We need to get home as soon as possible.”

“One more night won’t hurt anything. Please?” she begged softly.

“I’m afraid of hurting you,” I objected.

“I’ll be fine,” she said. “You’re very gentle. Please.”

She kissed me again and I fought against the desire. I tried not to respond to her mouth sucking gently at mine, or to the teasing of her tongue. It seemed wrong to make love to her now. I’d forgotten lately just how fragile she was, and now, this situation had suddenly brought it all back into sharp focus. I could hurt her. I already had hurt her, but I could hurt her worse.

“Edward, please,” she whispered urgently. “I need you to make love to me.” She pressed her hips into mine and I lost the fight. I wanted her so badly and I needed to feel that connection with her again. I wanted to love away all the anger and harsh words of our argument. I felt a distance between us, and it scared me.

“I’m sorry for yelling at you,” I said.

“Me, too. Carry me into the bedroom and love me.”

I scooped her up gently in my arms and carried her to our bed. Her eyes never left my face as I slowly peeled the clothes from her body, and then from mine. For the first time, I skipped all the foreplay, skipped all the kissing and touching and exploring of her body that I usually indulged in. What I needed to feel, more than anything else, was her body surrounding me. I pushed slowly and gently inside of her, moaning softly like I always did when I first felt her heat. I was being careful, perhaps too careful. She never once complained, or begged me to hurry like she usually did. Her gaze stayed on my face the entire time we made love. We both seemed to want to drink in the sight of each other, afraid to look away, afraid the other one would disappear if we did. So our eyes held.

I wanted to remember everything about her. I wanted to etch into my brain the sounds she made, the expressions sweeping over her face, the smell of her skin, the feel of her warm breath as she

panted against my cheek, the heat of the liquid warmth that gripped me tightly as I moved.

I pushed deep, but still gently. Kissed deep and very slowly. Her fingertips grazed my cheek, my chin, my mouth as we moved together. My fingers entwined in her hair, then moved lightly across her face, tracing her cheekbones, her nose, her eyebrows. I dipped my head and planted soft kisses up her neck and then across to her mouth. Our tongues danced slowly in time to our rhythm.

Our bodies melded and moved together more urgently now. Her blood was pulsing, her heart pounding. Her scent was strong and stripped my mind of all reason. Dizziness. Soft moans turning into deeper ones. Whispered profanities slipping from our throats. Deep, hard pushes. Soft whimpers, then low, hoarse moans. A slow but steady building; a pressure not to be denied. Eyes fluttering shut, and then quickly opening. Watching. A tightness, a heat. A deep and grinding rhythm. A final hard push to the end.

I closed my eyes and let go, moaning hoarsely against the soft skin of her cheek. Intense pleasure touched every nerve in my body. I opened my eyes again and watched hers squeeze shut and listened to my name rushing from her mouth. The sight of her, the sounds coming from her intensified the sensations riding my body. It seemed to go on forever. Her hips continued to push against mine long after I was through. She wanted more, so I gathered her up in my arms and thrust into her with a focused and determined urgency. Heat. Tightness. Nails digging into my shoulders, then my arms. Panting. Screaming.

Then, without warning, an intense feeling of love washed over me, overwhelming with its force. It flooded into my mind and pushed everything else away; I was drowning in it. My name, whispered over and over, snaked through my thoughts. ‘Edward. Edward’ it sighed. And another name I didn’t recognize. ‘Little nudger’.

I gasped and pulled back to look at her face. Her eyes were closed, her lips parted as soft sighs escaped from them. Sighs, not words. Then as suddenly as it had appeared, the feeling left, leaving an empty vacuum in my head where it had been. A hollow emptiness. Bella’s thoughts. I’d heard her thoughts again!

“Edward,” she sobbed suddenly. She pulled my mouth to hers and I tasted her tears. I held her close as she cried against my chest. I didn’t know what to say, so I just rocked her gently and crooned to her. I had no way of knowing whether these were happy tears or sad ones. Her mind was closed to me once again.

“Promise me you won’t hurt our baby,” she cried, her voice muffled against my chest. “Promise me, please!”

I pulled her away so I could look into her eyes. “Bella,” I whispered hoarsely, my voice shaking with emotion. “I could never hurt anything that you love so much. Especially not our little nudger.”

Shock swept over her face. “You heard?”

I nodded silently. “I heard. And I promise I won’t hurt our child.”

A fresh round of tears soon followed. I held her and sung to her softly until she finally drifted off to sleep in my arms.

That was a promise I would try my best to keep. I could never kill anything that Bella loved so intensely. If I could have, Jacob would have been dead long ago. But her grief would have been

deep and would have destroyed any love she felt for me, so he lived, and so would this child. No matter how much I did not want it to exist, Bella loved this being growing inside of her. The depth of that love had stunned me when it had flooded into my mind. Instinctively, I knew that our love would never survive the breaking of this promise.

I gazed upon her body stretched out alongside mine. My eyes touched every inch of her and finally came to rest on her stomach. I reached over and lightly laid my hand on the slight bump in her otherwise smooth skin.

Our little nudger...

You're safe. I promise.

And that is the end of my version of the honeymoon. As you probably noticed, I changed some stuff up. I just did not like the way SM wrote this whole pregnancy thing. My beloved Edward was turned into a lump of goo sitting in the floor at Bella's feet for most of Breaking Dawn. He emotionally and physically deserted the woman he claimed to love at one of the most difficult times of her life. I simply could not let go of my anger at that. So, I decided to rewrite all this MY way.

There is a sequel to this story called, ["The Road Not Taken: a Breaking Dawn Rewrite"](#), which addresses the bloody birth in a kinder, gentler way.

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